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Trauma and the Representation of the Unsayable in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction

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TRAUMA AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE UNSAYABLE IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FICTION

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Warren F. Motte, Jr.

For victims of trauma to speak about the events they have undergone is a complicated act, as it is both necessary to the healing process and painfully evocative of past suffering. A victim frequently senses a dual compulsion: one that makes speaking necessary, and another that makes it impossible. Verbal expression helps a victim to process what has happened, and may also have important practical implications (as in a legal testimony that could bring the aggressor to account); at the same time, though, traumatic experiences are often referred to as unspeakable or unimaginable, implying that it is not only difficult, but impossible to distill what has happened into language.

The nature of writing exhibits a similar tension between expression and silence. The attempt to express the ineffable is part of the impetus to create, as a writer strives to bridge the gap between words and ideas or emotions. While the process yields a product of a linguistic expression, it also results in a paradoxical disconnect or silence at the root of that same creation. When writers write about trauma, the double pull toward language and toward silence is even stronger, as the writer must engage with both the tension present in processing trauma, and that inherent in writing itself.

In each chapter I explore the ways in which fiction writers experiment with the form of their works in order to best depict the reality of a traumatic experience. Some of these traumas are vast, as in Edmond Jabès's *Le livre des questions* (1963-1973), which addresses not only the Holocaust, but also questions of exile and identity. Others are on a smaller scale, such as Jacques

Roubaud's *Quelque chose noir* (1986), Julio Cortázar's *Los autonautas de la cosmopista* (1983), and Macedonio Fernández's *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* (1967, posthumous); in each of these works, the author grapples with the loss and subsequent mourning of a spouse. Finally, Gérard Gavarry's *Hop là! un deux trois* (2001) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) both address the difficulties of responding to more ambiguous, insidious forms of trauma perpetrated by an entire society.

Many thanks to the people who have helped me along the way: especially to Warren Motte for his sharp eye, thorough comments, and support at every step; to Philippe Brand, Nana Holtsnider, Meghan Vicks, and Annje Wiese for their feedback in the rougher stages; to Ajay for his support and companionship; and to my parents for their encouragement.

Contents

List of Abbreviations Used

ND Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics.* Trans. E. B. Ashton (1973).

CC Barthes, Roland. *La chambre claire* (1980).

CL Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard (1981).

ED Blanchot, Maurice. *L'écriture du désastre* (1980).

EI Blanchot, Maurice. *L'entretien infini* (1969).

IC Blanchot, Maurice. *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson (1993).

WD Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*. Trans. Ann Smock (1986).

E&D Derrida, Jacques. *L'écriture et la différence* (1967).

W&D Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference.* Trans. Alan Bass (1978).

HL Gavarry, Gérard. *Hop là! un deux trois* (2001).

FR Gavarry, Gérard. *Façon d'un roman* (2003).

EL Jabès, Edmond. .(*El, ou le dernier livre*) (1973).

A Jabès, Edmond. *Aely* (1972).

BQ Jabès, Edmond. *The Book of Questions: The Book of Questions, The Book of Yukel, Return to the Book.* Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (1972).

YEA Jabès, Edmond. *The Book of Questions: Yaël, Elya, Aely*. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (1983).

DL Jabès, Edmond. *Du désert au livre* (1980).

E Jabès, Edmond. *Elya* (1969).

DB Jabès, Edmond. *From the Desert to the Book* (1990).

LQ Jabès, Edmond. *Le livre des questions, Le livre de Yukel, Le retour au livre* (published together by Gallimard, 2006).

Y Jabès, Edmond. *Yaël* (1967).

WH LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001).

HR Lang, Berel. *Holocaust Representation* (2000)

I. Introduction

For victims or witnesses of trauma to speak about the events they have undergone is a complicated act, for it is both necessary to the healing process and painfully evocative of past suffering. A victim frequently senses a dual compulsion: one that makes speaking necessary, and another that makes it impossible. Speaking helps a victim to process what has happened, and may also have important practical implications (as in a legal testimony that could bring the aggressor to account); at the same time, though, traumatic experiences are often referred to as unspeakable or unimaginable, implying that it is not only difficult but impossible to cast what has happened into language.

While I do not wish to trivialize the experience of trauma by the comparison, the nature of writing exhibits a similar tension between expression and silence. The attempt to express the ineffable is part of the impetus to create, as a writer strives to bridge the gap between words and ideas or emotions. While the process yields a linguistic expression, it also results in a paradoxical disconnect or silence at the root of that same creation, because whatever the writer desired to express can never be identical to the words used to express it. When writers write about trauma, the double pull toward language and toward silence is even stronger, for the writer must engage with both the tension present in processing trauma, and that inherent in writing itself.

One domain in which this tension is particularly salient is that of Holocaust literature, as evidenced by the extensive discussion surrounding Theodor Adorno's statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"[1] which I will discuss in further detail in my first chapter. To be sure, the creation as well as the contemplation of aesthetic beauty after an occurrence as traumatic as the Holocaust is necessarily problematic. While Adorno later recanted his

[1] "Cultural Criticism and Society," *Prisms* 34; essay written in 1949.

statement,[2] the notion that art is incompatible with devastating trauma nevertheless continues to be a thought-provoking one. The sheer scope and incomprehensibility of the atrocities of the Second World War (and, as I will argue, of other events on a reduced scale) fundamentally alter the ways in which a person engages with the world. The trauma of Auschwitz extends far beyond its immediate impact, expanding into a global (or at least Western) upheaval that spans multiple generations, partly due to the mere possibility of its occurrence.

While an element of unspeakability is arguably present in virtually all literature, the focus of my dissertation will be on late twentieth-century works that engage explicitly with trauma or mourning in some manner. I intend to explore the various ways in which writers interact with trauma while also creating a work of meaningful artistic expression through the medium of language. Some of the authors I will examine are writing out of a personal tragedy; others explore the trauma of a fictional character; still others bear the weight of traumatic social injustice. In each case, I will examine the ways that each writer attempts to incorporate that which cannot be said into the language of the text, often through some form of formal experimentation and the use of absence or silence as a signifier. Because the prevalence of unconventional formal elements in trauma literature is striking and powerful, I will also seek to uncover the affinities between representation of the traumatic and literary experimentation, particularly through the element of the unsayable.

In each chapter I will explore the ways in which fiction writers experiment with the form of their works in order best to depict the reality of a traumatic experience. Some of these traumas are vast, as in Edmond Jabès's *Le livre des questions* (1963-1973), which addresses not only the

[2] In his 1966 essay "After Auschwitz," Adorno recasts his statement, noting, "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 362). Whether or not such expression is a "right" (as opposed to a necessity, for instance) is something I will consider in my second chapter.

Holocaust, but also questions of exile and identity. Others are set on a much smaller scale, such as in Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque chose noir* (1986), Julio Cortázar's *Los autonautas de la cosmopista* (1983), and Macedonio Fernández's *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* (1967); in each of those works, the author grapples with the loss of a spouse. Finally, Gérard Gavarry's *Hop là! un deux trois* (2001) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) both address the difficulties of responding to more ambiguous, insidious forms of trauma perpetrated by an entire society.

In each of the above works, the author engages with the emotionally volatile terrain of loss and trauma, and must navigate the tension between exploring the nuances found there and acknowledging the difficulty of expressing them. While any instance of trauma is highly individual, one thing that many victims of trauma have in common is this delicate equilibrium between a desire to speak about what they have experienced in order to process it, and an inability to condense their suffering into the medium of language. Because literature is necessarily linguistic, writers who create works dealing with trauma are uniquely positioned to explore the edge where silence and language meet. Often, the most interesting and emotionally true depictions of mourning or suffering can be found in works where the writer experiments with the form of a story. By enabling the form as well as the content to express the difficulty of communication, writers can make silence signify powerfully.

The field of trauma studies is fairly well established, particularly in relation to Holocaust testimonies. Writers such as Berel Lang, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub (among many others) have explored the challenges inherent in writing about or bearing witness to trauma, particularly from the psychological standpoint of the victim. I discuss the ideas of these and other theorists at length in the first chapter; they provide a solid starting point for my work, and help contextualize trauma narrative in terms of psychology. That background is

helpful because while the psychological effects of trauma on a victim or a witness are profound and undoubtedly influence any artistic works that stem from a traumatic experience, psychology is not part of my expertise and does not figure into my ownanalysis. After exploring the works of some of the major figures in trauma studies, my own line of inquiry then takes a different direction. I do not so much focus on why it may be difficult to express emotions related to a traumatic episode, but rather on the concrete ways that writers demonstrate that difficulty within their writing. The psychological component remains an essential starting point, but my focus is on literary expression.

Ultimately, two fundamental questions drive my interest and my line of inquiry. First, I want to understand why so many contemporary works incorporate elements of discontinuity and absence into not just the content, but the very form of the text. Second, I wonder how the written word can be used to depict something, such as a traumatic experience, that is irreducible to language. By investigating both of these questions, I come to understand interruption as an integral part of language, and that it is partly because of this inherent discontinuity that language is a viable and powerful medium for communicating the experience of trauma.

My investigation considers not only the psychology of the victim, but also the nature of language itself, and opens into a discussion of how and why many writers experiment with the form of their work in order to demonstrate the difficulty of recounting a traumatic experience. Additionally, I explore the ways that writing about trauma can illustrate certain things about the nature of language that are not always apparent. While trauma narrative has a particular reason for creating a sense of discontinuity and silence, each of those elements is important to the way that all communication is carried out. My work takes Maurice Blanchot's "Interruption" essay as a starting point. His examination of the inherent discontinuity in language develops in a very

natural way into considerations of how writers can call attention to the element of interruption, and why it is important to do so. Blanchot asserts that interruption is a fundamental component of conversation, for reasons as basic as speakers taking turns, and also of language itself, for there is always a disconnect between a word and what it signifies. What this means for trauma literature and for literature in general is that elements of discontinuity and of silence do not indicate some kind of lack; rather, they underscore a truth about language and allow the reader to reflect on it.

My dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter sets up my theoretical framework, and the other four chapters engage directly with literary works. While I refer to theory and other critical sources throughout all of the literature chapters, I found it important to devote a full chapter to the ideas that provided impetus and support for my analyses in order to highlight the questions that are the undercurrents of my investigation. Because my dissertation is centered on a theme rather than a single author, certain themes recur many times from different angles, in a sort of refrain. The initial theory chapter helps to lay out the theoretical context of my argument, and also suggests the strengths and weaknesses that I find in other writers' engagements with similar topics. I have mentioned both Adorno and Blanchot above; their work sparked my interest in examining the ways that unspeakability can be written. Keeping in mind both Adorno's assertion of the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz, and also the interruption and silence that are fundamental to language according to Blanchot, I believe that the two concepts are in some way reconciled with each other. Writing about trauma is impeded because of the inherent tendency towards silence in a victim; however, if a writer can incorporate that silence in the text in a fundamental way, then the writing is liberated to explore the ways that people come to terms with trauma. In the initial chapter, I also take into consideration the differences and

similarities between mourning and trauma, as well as the extreme individuality of pain, and what it means that pain cannot be truly understood by anyone other than the person who feels it in a given moment. By establishing a baseline of what I hear in the term "trauma," how I understand silence as working within both traumatic recollection and language itself, and the personal nature of pain, I attempt to provide the reader with a helpful framework for the literary analysis that follows in the subsequent chapters.

Each chapter explores one or two works in depth, focusing on a different component of the unspeakable in contemporary literature. By bringing in multiple voices from several different cultures, I hope to demonstrate the breadth and universality of the issue that I explore, and also the depth of the question of how to deal with unspeakability in a written text. Each of the writers that figures into my dissertation has responded to the challenge posed by the unspeakable nature of trauma in a different manner.

In the second chapter, I follow my line of inquiry related to Blanchot toward *Le livre des questions* by Edmond Jabès. Of all the writers whose work I examine, Jabès is the one who engages most directly with the Holocaust—albeit in a way that leaves much room for interpretation and questioning. Jabès himself was not affected by the Holocaust; he was living in Cairo at the time, and experienced the Holocaust most vividly through a sense of survivor's guilt rather than personal trauma. Still, the traumatic experience of the Holocaust is represented in a way that feels deeply personal in *Le livre des questions*. While Jabès may not have been directly affected by the Holocaust, he did endure the trauma of exile. He also associates trauma and exile with some of the most basic elements of Judaism and Jewish heritage, and fosters a connection between trauma and the written word by exploring writing as another of the most basic, essential components of Judaism.

Jabès creates haunting connections among these and other elements that seem unrelated or contradictory, never flattening their difference, but rather suggesting unlikely affinities that open into rich new meaning. One such pairing is that of silence and either sound or the written word. The contradiction of silence and expression is at the forefront of *Le livre des questions*. Silence and scream are two central images in the work, suggesting two possible responses to trauma that the victim must—but cannot—engage in simultaneously. While they seem to be opposite extremes, both are inarticulate and instinctive responses to trauma, making them more similar than not. By putting a false opposition such as this at the heart of his work, Jabès suggests the importance of examining and undoing other instances of apparent contradiction that are affinities in reality. Furthermore, Jabès considers trauma through a lens of the rabbinic traditions of Judaism, which include not only the myths and histories of Jewish heritage, but also the essential emphasis on writing and on questioning. My reading on Jabès focuses on images of blankness as silence, trauma as a root element both of Judaism and of writing, contradiction as foundational, and the idea of the Book as the ideal integration of all of these notions.

The third chapter shifts to personal tragedy and minimalist aesthetics in Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque chose noir.* The deeply touching and intimate extended poem is an elegy to Roubaud's wife, Alix Cléo, who died of a pulmonary embolism at the age of thirty-one. *Quelque chose noir* provides a window into Roubaud's intensely personal mourning process, which is filled with silence. Roubaud suggests that silence through the form of the poem, which contains much white space and visual breaks within the lines, and also through the imagery that he incorporates, which often centers on whiteness and blackness. Alix Cléo had been a photographer, and the photographic image—along with its corresponding negative—is a source for many of Roubaud's reflections.

Additionally, the poem is in unspoken conversation with the published journals of Alix Cléo, a conversation where one partner is absent. The absence is made more explicit in the English translation than it is in the French publication; in Rosmarie Waldrop's translation as published by Dalkey Archive Press, an appendix of Alix Cléo's photographs is included following the text. The photographs add a rich layer of meaning to Roubaud's poetry, but the choice to include them in the same volume as the poetry gives the reader a very different encounter. Whereas the absence is merely suggested in the French and further exploration is left to the reader's prior knowledge or inquiry, the English version directs the reader to make the connection. Still, though, Alix Cléo's words are not included, leaving Roubaud's conversation one-sided. My chapter focuses on Roubaud's use of form to suggest loss and renewal, black and white photography as a representation of mourning, and silence within expression through word choice and imagery.

In my fourth chapter, I engage with two works by two different authors, both from Argentina: *Los autonautas de la Cosmopista* by Julio Cortázar (co-written with Carol Dunlop), and *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* by Macedonio Fernández.[3] These two works have a lighter tone than the previous two; both are playful despite having strong connections to loss and mourning. That playfulness is what sparked my interest in the two pieces, and it is the reason that I paired them in this chapter. Whereas Jabès is enigmatic and suggestive and Roubaud is heartfelt and mournful, Cortázar and Macedonio both write ludic pieces that nonetheless do not deny the loss that sits at their cores. Cortázar's wife and co-author died before the book was completed, leaving Cortázar to finish it alone; Macedonio's work considers loss and absence within the

[3] I will refer to Macedonio Fernández by his first name alone, as is usually done in Latin American literary criticism pertaining to his work.

textual world, and may also have connections to the loss of Macedonio's wife, Elena.[4] By incorporating elements of play into their works, both writers create indirect links to loss that do not deny pain, but do not discuss it directly, either. By doing so, they effectively allow space for the unspeakable in a way that is subtle and organic. In my reading of *Los autonautas*, I consider the role of time and the way temporality is portrayed; the act of writing and the limits of the written word; loss as a foundational element that is not disclosed until the book's end; and the nature of freedom in play. My focus in my analysis of *Museo* is on mourning as creative impetus, and on implicit and explicit limits on the text and ways that those limits are made flexible through ludics.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I look at *Hop là! un deux trois* by Gérard Gavarry and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. I have grouped these two works together despite their different contexts because both authors address a major social trauma that affects a large number of people within a community, and both displace the perpetrator of that trauma into another figure. While loss or trauma usually has a clear origin, social injustice is much more nebulous, yet the need to process the trauma persists. In order to cope with the indefinable components of social trauma, Gavarry displaces the perpetrator into one character's gesture, while Morrison displaces it into the living apparition of a dead child. My examination of Gavarry's work focuses on fragmentation and the retelling of an old story, the voluntary or involuntary perpetuation of a system, and suburban banality. When I turn to Morrison, I focus on the role and unpredictability of memory, the embodiment of trauma, and storytelling and silence.

[4] In her 2010 translation of *Museo*, Margaret Schwartz contests this idea, noting indications in Macedonio's manuscripts that the work is more strongly connected with a later partner, Consuelo Bosch (see Schwartz xv-xx). Nonetheless, the theme of love and loss as an essential impetus for the creative process remains compelling, both in *Museo* and in Macedonio's earlier poetry, and suggests the importance of the mourning process to his writing.

I chose the works I have included here because each provides a different way of talking about trauma, while still respecting its unspeakability. The texts that I have selected depict a wide spectrum of types of trauma, from the far-reaching horror of the Holocaust, to the deeply personal trauma of unexpectedly losing a spouse, to the subtle and insidious trauma inflicted by unjust social systems. I hope to demonstrate that regardless of the scale of a traumatic event, written texts that try to work through such events demonstrate profound similarities. There are undoubtedly many, many other authors whose works would have fit in well with my topic, and I considered many others at one point or another: Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras, Jean Echenoz, Mark Z. Danielewski, Jonathan Safran Foer, Anne Carson, Paul Auster, and Ricardo Piglia are just some of the other writers whose works I considered. Because so many writers are either propelled by trauma or compelled to explore it through their characters, grappling with unspeakability is something that occurs in many, many works in the late twentieth century. Ultimately, my choices reflect not only the desire to work with texts that provide interesting ways of exploring my thematic and theoretical questions, but also my personal tastes.

While some of the texts I analyze could be best classified as postmodern, I have chosen not to engage with the separate and highly complex question of what postmodernity is or how it functions. Some of the theory that I include reflects questions that are integral to postmodernity, such as the nature of language and the self's relationship to the other, but I have chosen not to dwell on those questions, and rather to make certain assumptions or leave certain questions aside in order to focus my argument more solidly on how writers navigate the unspeakable in their texts. Nonetheless, some of the texts—especially, but not exclusively, *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*—are highly metaliterary and experimental, and could be of great interest if analyzed

through the lens of postmodernist aesthetics. Such a discussion, as interesting as it might be, falls outside of the purview of my analysis here.

Over the course of my research, I found the tension of expression and unspeakability asserting itself time and time again. Countless works of literature take their starting point in a traumatic event, either in the life of the author or within the confines of the plot. Trauma and mourning tap into deep human emotions, and thus spark a need and desire to process that emotion in a meaningful way. While the tension between expression and silence is real and powerful, it is not a threat to the literature; rather, it is a spark that initiates creativity in the attempt to reconcile both impulses without denying either of them.

II. Theories of Trauma; Absence as Signifier

Before closely examining works of fiction and poetry, I will focus on theory in this first chapter. While theory is not the main focal point of my dissertation, I will turn to it frequently in order to bring imaginative writing into conversation with other avenues of thought and culture. Literature that deals with trauma is often highly bound up in cultural or historical occurrences, and also in the way a culture understands suffering and expression; a close look at theory is thus a useful starting point to a discussion of such literature. Pain and mourning, while highly individual, are also profoundly human, and provide the possibility for empathetic connection between the reader and the work. When one undergoes or witnesses a traumatic experience, the need for expression—both for the sake of the other and for the victim's own sake—becomes particularly strong. Verbal expression following a traumatic event serves a double need. The first is that of communicating to an interlocutor the events that have occurred, which may be in order to reach a practical end (such as receiving necessary medical attention or obtaining justice in a court of law) or an emotional one. The second need is for the victim him- or herself, as expression helps to clarify in one's own psyche what has happened and eventually to move beyond the initial shock to a restored normal state. The compulsion to write or speak of trauma or death is inherent in the mourning process, whether mourning the loss of another or of some part of oneself.

The expression of suffering seems to be necessary and straightforward, but it carries a fundamentally paradoxical implication as well. Because any traumatic event has a component that is difficult if not impossible to speak of owing to the painful nature of the experience, there is a pervasive unspeakable element in much literature dealing with trauma. My main argument is that while each of the texts I examine in later chapters engages with trauma, there is also a

component of silence in each of them that testifies to the impossibility of fully explaining the events that one has undergone. The second part to this assertion is that the tendency towards formal experimentation in late twentieth-century literature affords particularly innovative and fertile means for expressing this silence; indeed, much of the fragmentation that is found in literature from the last half-century could likely be traced to an effort of depicting and working through trauma. Many of the writers whose work I will analyze navigate the difficulty of writing something that cannot be directly said by incorporating experimental elements in their work. I propose that formal experimentation is a useful and even an organic way to suggest silence and unspeakability in the fabric of the written work, and I will explore some of the approaches that contemporary fiction writers take in order to process their own traumas or to depict the mourning of others.

I shall now examine the work of several of the theorists and scholars who provide important perspectives on the question of how suffering is expressed in language, and why there is an ineffable component that resists language. While trauma and mourning do not necessarily result from the same event, in many cases mourning does stem from a traumatic incident, and so I will consider texts that engage with the psychological, literary, and philosophical implications of both. The notion of giving voice to the unspeakable is clearly aporetic, and may therefore be a project doomed to failure (as the unspeakable loses its primary trait when spoken). Still, many writers of fiction attempt to provide an insight into the unsayable by linguistic means, as do many writers of theory and criticism when discussing such works. The effort to capture the unspeakable component of trauma in language is an important one in mapping a full range of a person's emotional spectrum. By approaching the unspeakable component indirectly, by means

of silence in the form of their works rather than direct mention of it, the writers whose work I will examine furnish a space for the indefinable in their writing.

While very few of the fictional works focus explicitly or solely on the Holocaust, I have devoted significant space to theoretical approaches of post-Holocaust writing in this chapter because of its status as the archetype of trauma literature. Much of the theory that has been written regarding the literary representation of trauma originates in an attempt to fully understand writing about the Holocaust, as it marked such a powerful turning point in modern Western self-understanding. The Holocaust has come to designate the epitome of trauma, and while it may not seem justified to compare smaller-scale traumas to such a catastrophic event, the writing about them has similar tendencies.

Trauma, Mourning, and the Difficulty of Expression

While mourning and trauma are not interchangeable in terms of experience, the process of recovering from each is similar. By examining the mourning process, it will be easier to understand what occurs psychologically and emotionally for a victim who is working through a traumatic incident. Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) is an essential starting point for a discussion involving the mourning process. It provides a helpful basic paradigm for understanding the nature of mourning, partly by defining it against something that it is not—that is, melancholia. Freud notes the similarities between the two states, but also expresses the significant ways in which they differ. First, the source of the two states does not cause the differentiation between them, for mourning and melancholia may be provoked by the same event. The loss that sparks each may be something clear and literal, such as the death of a loved one, or it may be more figurative. He defines the difference between the two states as follows:

"Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on. As an effect of the same influences, melancholia instead of a state of grief develops in some people, whom we consequently suspect of a morbid pathological disposition" (Freud 153). Freud goes on to suggest that the normal reaction to such an event is mourning, whereas melancholia is a clinically abnormal state for which a person is treated as a patient. Mourning is expected to pass with time, whereas melancholia is not. Not only are the sources of mourning and melancholia the same, but they also provoke similar symptoms. Freud suggests that both emotional states result in pain, loss of interest in the outside world, an inability to love, and an inhibition of activity (153). Similarly, both mourning and melancholia are all-consuming, absorbing the full energy of the suffering person: “this inhibition and circumscription in the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to its mourning, which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests” (153). The two cannot be distinguished by what brought them on, or by the symptoms that the person demonstrates. In both instances, the patient faces an unspeakable element of their suffering that cannot be reduced to language. What does differentiate mourning from melancholia, though, is the way the symptoms progress as time passes, and the sufferer’s awareness of the reason for his or her pain. The act of mourning is ultimately a productive act that works through the unspeakable component of suffering and eventually reconciles the individual to the new situation. Melancholia, on the other hand, is unproductive; the person does not know what has been lost, and the lack of awareness forbids the possibility of attempting to express the unspeakable.

Mourning, in contrast to melancholia, demonstrates a more structured process. First, the mourner knows precisely why he or she mourns, as the loss is clearly identifiable. For the

mourner, time is the remedy for the things he or she experiences. In melancholia, however, the person may not be aware of what exactly has been lost. Freud describes it as the "unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss" (155). As time progresses, then, the mourner gradually feels the loss less acutely, whereas the melancholic may still not be aware of what has been lost in the first place. Melancholia also demonstrates loss of self-worth, and there is less of a clear sense as to why the person withdraws, whereas for mourning it is clear: one withdraws because one is absorbed in the work of mourning. Mourning indeed has work to accomplish—the work of grief, of itself—and when that work is completed, the mourning ceases. As Freud notes, "this pain seems natural to us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (154). Freud sums up the difference by saying that "in grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (155). This is because melancholia does not recognize the lost object, and instead attributes the loss to some part of the self (158). It could be said that in mourning, absence and unspeakability are found external to the self, while in melancholia, they are internal to it. This phrasing is not perfect, as the unspeakable cannot be precisely delineated or located, but it is a helpful way of distinguishing between the two states. Most of the works that I will examine in subsequent chapters deal with the clearer process of mourning, although a melancholic component frequently works itself in as well. Though the primary loss may be apparent, there is often a range of less identifiable losses that exacerbate the anguish of the mourner. The element that I find most important in this essay is that of mourning as work—a process that yields an end result. By examining texts that deal with loss though a form of mourning, it becomes apparent that such texts enable either the writer or a character to work through grief and toward healing.

While Freud is crucial reading from a psychological standpoint, it is also helpful to consider writers who engage more explicitly with the relationships among loss, trauma, and literary expression. Several writers contribute to the foundation of my understanding of trauma in relation to writing, notably Elaine Scarry, Cathy Caruth, and Ruth Leys. Scarry's book, *The Body in Pain* (1985), examines ways that pain contributes to constructive and destructive processes, and is a touchstone for later writers engaging with similar ideas. Caruth builds more specifically on the necessity of expression as a means of assimilating the sometimes incomprehensible occurrence of a traumatic incident in her book, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). Finally, Leys brings her work, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), into direct conversation with that of Caruth as she examines the role of memory and post-traumatic stress disorder in writing that deals with trauma.

Elaine Scarry provides a helpful starting point for examining contemporary theory related to trauma and expression, as she explores some of the fundamental assumptions about what pain is and how individuals respond to it. In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry lays out her three guiding principles of the text in the first paragraph: "*first*, the difficulty of expressing physical pain; *second*, the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and *third*, the nature of both material and verbal expressibility or, more simply, the nature of human creation" (3). Thus at the root of her work is not only the fact that testimony of trauma is a difficult but crucial part of the human creative process, but also how one goes about creating in the first place, and what the larger consequences of such creation may be.

One of the essential foundations of Scarry's argument is that of the absolutely individual and private nature of pain. She emphasizes the fact that pain cannot be shared, and that understanding one's own pain is not the same as understanding the pain of another (Scarry 4).

Because pain is so highly individual, explaining exactly what one feels is not a simple task. This is part of the reason that fiction and nonverbal art forms are important ways of depicting pain: they allow the victim to allude to what he or she is experiencing, rather than trying to explain it in precise terms. As Scarry puts it, "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Furthermore, "its resistance to language is not simply one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to what it is" (Scarry 5). She elucidates some of the many ways that people have attempted to make it easier for a victim to accurately express or describe pain, which demonstrates "the assumption that the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain" (Scarry 9). Just as doctors must accurately gauge a patient's pain based on the patient's own description of it before providing treatment, expression is likewise an important component in understanding and healing emotional or psychological pain.

Scarry also notes certain similarities between pain and creation, namely at the level of language. As evidence that pain and imagination function as "each other's missing intentional counterpart," she notes that "there is one piece of language used—in many different languages—at once as a near synonym for pain, *and* as a near synonym for created object; and that is the word 'work'" (Scarry 169). She envisions this similarity as a kind of spectrum: "the more [work] realizes and transforms itself in its object, the closer it is to the imagination, to art, to culture; the more it is unable to bring forth an object or, bringing it forth, is then cut off from its object, the more it approaches the condition of pain" (169). Scarry's text is an important one for understanding the connections that inherently exist between suffering and creating, and also for

comprehending the experiences of each of these processes as well. She dissects much that can otherwise be taken for granted, thus exposing why certain affinities make themselves apparent.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, written about ten years after Scarry's work, Cathy Caruth explores not only the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of post-traumatic expression, but also the relationship between the suffering person and the event in terms of memory and his or her conceptual framework. In explaining her title, Caruth suggests that a traumatic experience remains "unclaimed" until an individual is able to reconcile the event with an understanding of reality. She defines trauma as a wound inflicted on either the body or the mind, and specifies that it is typically shocking or unexpected. Basing her reading on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), she suggests that the difficulties related to expression of trauma arise immediately upon its occurrence. She describes trauma as a wound that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 4). The attempt to express what has happened is not only directed toward the other in order to communicate or explain, but also toward the self in order to clarify the occurrence and attest to its reality. Based on this assumption, she proposes that traumatic events both elicit and elude testimony: "If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively, is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it *simultaneously defies and demands our witness*" (Caruth 5, emphasis mine). The tension inherent in testimony of trauma is at the root of what I will explore when I turn towards fictional works in later chapters, as each writer that I examine engages with this tension in a slightly different way.

The notion that the victim only becomes fully cognizant of an experienced trauma through the process of bearing witness to it poses its own set of difficulties. If a person is not entirely aware of the full brunt of an experience when it occurs, but only when the person tells about it, then the trauma is continually relived in ever more vivid ways. This raises the question as to whether the most scarring experience is "the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it" (Caruth 7). If the trauma is not fully comprehended at the moment of its occurrence, leaving instead a sense of shock to be untangled later, it is arguably the untangling that creates a much more profound psychological wound as the person proceeds to re-live the experience with a sharper awareness. Victims constantly deal with this difficulty of renewed pain. Though memory is imperfect, particularly in cases of trauma, it is all but impossible to entirely forget memories of pain. As the mind involuntarily recalls those impressions, they could potentially become more (rather than less) vivid as the victim has time to piece together the events that have occurred. In the case of mourning, as Freud suggests, re-living that pain may lead towards an end point of healing. Trauma may function slightly differently than mourning, though, and it is possible that while the renewal of pain is necessary for the (equally necessary) testimony of the victim, it may not ultimately lead towards healing. When a person bears witness to a traumatic experience, it may serve to help the person heal, but it may also simply be a step in understanding what has happened, or in trying to elicit some form of justice (as in the testimony in a court of law). Recalling the pain, then, may not have the same redemptive function that it does in the case of mourning. If it does contribute to healing, it is a decidedly non-linear process, as the victim constantly cycles between the present and the past experience.

Caruth highlights the discontinuity inherent in the traumatic experience in other ways as well. Because of the complexities present in the experience of trauma itself, as well as the attempt to tell of the experience, a simple direct account becomes impossible. In Caruth's chapter on Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais, she notes that she "would suggest that the interest of *Hiroshima mon amour* lies in how it explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling" (27). The "indirectness" is essential to the possibility of recounting not just the facts of what happened, but also the emotional reality of the event and its unspeakable nature. She makes an important point here; it is likely for this reason that so many writers incorporate fragmented or otherwise experimental forms into their writing when dealing with traumatic experiences. Taking an approach that is too direct would create a new shock, propelling the speaker and the listener both into an event of extreme intensity in a way that would feel false and probably hollow. The more something is fraught with emotion, the harder it is to talk about it; indirection and discontinuity, then, may be the most logical and genuine ways for a writer to discuss such an experience.

Taking a slightly different angle that devotes more attention to the fallibility of testimony, Ruth Leys focuses on the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder as related to memory and testimony in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000). The experience of trauma can fundamentally alter one's ability to recount it, simply because the experience is, tautologically, traumatic. Leys defines post-traumatic stress disorder as "fundamentally a disorder of memory. The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed" (Leys 2). The dissociation and inability to grasp the reality of what has happened is another way of describing the unspeakable component of trauma

that fundamentally resists language. Leys' account of trauma and witnessing is substantially more clinical than that of Caruth, and as such it provides important background information but will figure less prominently in my own line of thought. She engages in a useful synthesis of Freud, Caruth, and many others, bringing to light patterns that underline many of their lines of thinking. She boils these patterns down to two central theories of the way trauma is experienced and represented: the mimetic, and the antimimetic. In the mimetic, "precisely because the victim cannot recall the original traumatogenic event, she is fated to act it out or in other ways imitate it" (Leys 298). The antimimetic theory, on the other hand embraces an "antithetical idea that in hypnotic imitation the subject is essentially aloof from the traumatic experience, in the sense that she remains a spectator of the traumatic scene, which she can therefore see and represent to herself and others" (Leys 299). Both forms address the complex ways that a person experiences, remembers, and speaks about trauma.

Leys suggests that for Caruth as well as many others (such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, whose writing I will examine shortly), "the Holocaust in particular is the watershed event of the modern age because, uniquely terrible and unspeakable, it radically exceeds our capacity to grasp and understand it. And since this is so, the Holocaust is held to have precipitated, perhaps caused, an epistemological-ontological crisis of witnessing, a crisis manifested at the level of language itself" (Leys 268). The two important components of this remark are first that the Holocaust is frequently referred to as a stand-in for trauma in general because of its nature and scale, and second that the nature of such trauma provokes a rupture so fundamental that it occurs within language itself. While Leys is highly critical of certain elements of Caruth's arguments, she nonetheless recognizes the fundamental validity of her basic premises and provides a helpful examination of the text and its assumptions. One question underlying her text

is whether the goal of a victim working through trauma is to remember what has happened, or to forget, as healing seems to involve elements of both.

Each of the writers explored above contributes an important component to understanding the human experiences of pain, loss, and suffering, as well as the processes of mourning, despondency, or creativity that can emerge from them. They provide a helpful backdrop for the specific focal points of this dissertation.

Social and Textual Implications of Trauma and the Unspeakable

As indicated above, the devastation of the Holocaust is frequently referenced as an archetype of trauma. It follows, then, that any creative response to the Holocaust is also exemplary of how the creative process functions after trauma, albeit with the Holocaust remaining as the epitome of such a process. When Theodor Adorno claimed that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"[5] then, his statement had profound repercussions not only for the way people responded to the Holocaust itself, but to trauma in general. As noted by the writers previously discussed, traumatic events induce a need for expression, but also subvert the possibility of literally recounting what has happened, leaving nonliteral representation as possibly the best avenue for some kind of faithful representation of the emotional impact of an event. If artistic production is, as Adorno claims, "barbaric" after such a horrific event, then it would seem that victims or witnesses are left with no recourse to externalize their suffering. While Adorno's stance on the barbarism of artistic representation after trauma makes sense from a hypothetical and sociopolitical standpoint, it is untenable from a literary standpoint. Whether or not one *should,* from an ethical standpoint, produce a creative work has no bearing on the more immediate compulsion to produce such a work, as I discussed in the previous section. Adorno

[5] "Cultural Criticism and Society," *Prisms* 34; essay written in 1949.

tries to capture the notion of unspeakability by mandating that one should not speak. As a counterpoint to this idea, I will turn my attention to the work of Maurice Blanchot, particularly in *L'entretien infini* (1969). Blanchot's work focuses on fragmentation, interruption, and absence in a way that demonstrates that the unspeakable is not only a result of trauma, but inherent in language itself. To that effect, it is illogical to disallow expression after trauma, as all speech bears the mark of a wound in the form of silence. While Blanchot's writing may not have the same direct societal admonition as Adorno's, it nonetheless presents significant and broad-reaching implications regarding post-traumatic verbal expression.

While there are several interpretations of Adorno's statement that make sense in terms of the real experience of trauma and its aftermath, the controversy he created was so great that Adorno eventually recanted his statement and provided further explanation. Adorno could be referring to the unspeakable nature of the genocide, and his statement could thus indicate that to attempt to boil the full scope of the event into a poem is unfathomable. Another possibility is that the horror of the event is impossible to ignore, and so to continue to create beautiful things is to pretend that such an ugly reality did not occur. Likewise, the Holocaust represents a disaster within the very discourse of Western culture, and so to continue making use of elements of that culture to create beauty when they have also facilitated such destruction is incomprehensible. While all of these explanations are plausible on a theoretical or ethical level, the statement is less defensible when taken very literally to mean that artistic creation—for anyone, whether survivors or those untouched—could not and should not be undertaken. This is an unsustainable stance, because regardless of how impossible expressions of beauty may seem on a philosophical level, artistic expression is nevertheless an essential way for a victim to process trauma and to mourn loss, as I discussed above. To imply that a victim is complicit in her own suffering because she

writes poetry may be philosophically interesting, but is also cruel and repressive. Adorno's statement unsurprisingly sparked intense controversy, eventually leading Adorno to cast the idea in a different light. In "After Auschwitz," from *Negative Dialectics* (published in German in 1966), Adorno frames the issue of artistic creation as one hinging on rights: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (362). While Adorno focuses on what a victim has the right to do, he perhaps neglects the question of necessity: the tortured man may have the right to scream, but he does not do so merely because one has granted him that right, but because he cannot do otherwise. I argue that the need for artistic expression following trauma is of this same order, if not always on the same magnitude; the need for an outlet is pressing and urgent in many of the works that I will examine in this dissertation.

Adorno does not merely recant his statement, though; instead, he goes on in the next sentence to defend in part the line of thinking that had led to his earlier statement regarding the barbarism of poetry, framing it this time in a broader cultural scope that addresses survivors' guilt and the societal implications of an event such as the Holocaust:

> But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been

> imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier. (*ND* 362-3)

The issue of propriety, then, does not so much relate to the victim's own expression, but to the subsequent expression of those who did not suffer. What is more, it is not just poetry that Adorno finds impossible after the horrors of the Holocaust, but life itself. Shortly thereafter, he announces even more clearly that "this guilt is irreconcilable with living" (*ND* 364). If one considers Adorno's earlier statement alongside his later one, there is the implication that Adorno assumes an identity between art and life. Poetry in the first pronouncement functions as a metonymy for life, which becomes apparent in the second. Living seems impossible, and yet one lives; art likewise seems impossible, and yet perhaps it is in some ways persisting with art that softens the "coldness" of mere survival.

Still, the fact that Auschwitz occurred casts a shadow not only over future artistic production, but also on that which came prior to the trauma. In a strong statement in "Metaphysics and Culture," also from *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno declares, "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage. [. . .] Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be" (367). For Adorno, the Holocaust fundamentally changes the way we must consider our humanity, including all cultural creations. The complexities of Adorno's statements are undeniable. When he declares, "Attempts to express death in language are futile," (*ND* 371) there is nonetheless also the sense that language does indeed have power in recounting experiences of death or trauma. It is my goal in this dissertation to untangle how exactly language (and more

specifically, narrative) functions following trauma: how it is both necessary and impossible, how it can either heal or deepen the wound.

While Adorno focuses on the moral and societal implications of trauma, much of Maurice Blanchot's writing studies the paradoxical nature of trauma, the similarly paradoxical nature of language, and the connections between the two. Blanchot's work emphasizes the inherent discontinuity of each, and implies that trauma and language are inextricable from one another. In a work that focuses on both writing and trauma, *L'écriture du désastre* (1980),[6] he immediately draws upon contradictions, noting that "*désastre*" contains "*astre*" ("star"), and therefore illumination. At the same time, there is a constant negation in the word "désastre," which Blanchot takes to be an inherent rupture in the very nature of disaster: "The disaster: break with the star, break with every form of totality, never denying, however, the dialectical necessity of a fulfillment" (*WD* 75).[7] When he discusses Auschwitz, he talks about it in terms of knowledge and understanding: "And how, in fact, can one accept not to know? We read books on Auschwitz. The wish of all, in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time you will never know" (*WD* 82).[8] Here the perspective is not that of the writer, but of the reader, who is in a position of acquiring necessary knowledge about something that can never be fully known. The case is an extreme one; of course nobody who did not experience firsthand something as horrific as the Holocaust can understand it fully merely by reading a book. But the issue raises the question of how much one can know someone else, the other, without actually living the same experiences. There is a profound limitation between knowledge of the self and knowledge of the other; and yet, because rupture is inherent in

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[6] *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (1986). I will use Smock's translation throughout.
[7] "Le désastre, rupture avec l'astre, rupture avec toute forme de totalité, sans cependant denier la nécessité dialectique d'un accomplissement" (*ED* 121).
[8] "Et comment, en effet, accepter de ne pas connaître? Nous lisons les livres sur Auschwitz. Le vœu de tous, là-bas, le dernier vœu: sachez ce qui s'est passé, n'oubliez pas, et en même temps jamais vous ne saurez" (*ED* 131).

disaster, it seems to create the possibility of moving beyond ordinary limits of self, of experience, and of knowledge. Of the concentration camps, Blanchot describes them as "annihilation camps, emblems wherein the invisible has made itself visible forever" (*WD* 81),[9] one indication of the way in which trauma passes beyond limits. In this example, invisibility and visibility merge in the site of trauma until the limits between them, or between life and death, are no longer clear. Part of the reason for this engagement with limits is that Blanchot describes one trait of disaster as always threatening the other: "'I' am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other than I who passively become other" (*WD* 1).[10] The individual passes between self and other through disaster, just as above Blanchot describes the concentration camps as places where the invisible is made visible. Disaster wavers between the infinite and the zero; it has no reach, and is infinite in its reach. "There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say: the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit" (*WD* 1).[11] In all of these paradoxes is the idea that disaster is always a thing apart, beyond normal distinctions: "The disaster is separate; that which is most separate" (*WD* 1).[12] By transcending distinctions, disaster undermines limits that are typically thought of as fixed.

Fragmentation is likewise integral to Blanchot's discussion of disaster, and is most prominently displayed in the form of the work itself. Composed of a collection of fragments of varying lengths, Blanchot's style forces the reader to constantly engage in a sort of connective

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[9] "camps d'anéantissement, figures où l'invisible s'est à jamais rendu visible" (*ED* 129).
[10] "C'est dans la mesure où, épargné, laissé de côté, le désastre me menace qu'il menace en moi ce qui est hors de moi, un autre que moi qui deviens passivement autre" (*ED* 7).
[11] "Il n'y a pas atteinte du désastre. Hors d'atteinte est celui qu'il menace, on ne saurait dire si c'est de près ou de loin—l'infini de la menace a d'une certaine manière rompu toute limite" (*ED* 7).
[12] "Le désastre est séparé, ce qu'il y a de plus séparé" (*ED* 7).

work to find cohesion in the various ideas. There seems to be a certain assumption or intuition of meaning that allows Blanchot to leave such silences in his work; the silences or the gaps are not devoid of meaning, but are the places where the reader must find meaning beyond the text. He is aware of the necessity of language and of its prevalence, but also of the power of the nonverbal: "without language, nothing can be shown. And to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it" (*WD* 11).[13] The communicative silence is, perhaps, the disaster: "*When all is said, what remains to be said is the disaster. Ruin of words, demise writing, faintness faintly murmuring: what remains without remains* (the fragmentary)" (*WD* 33; italics in original).[14]

At times Blanchot conflates disaster with writing, while at other times he associates it with silence, a move that is disconcerting in its ambivalence but that provides interesting implications. One way in which they are linked is through the notion of passivity, which always includes, as he says, the erasure of the subject: "If there is a relation between writing and passivity, it is because both presuppose the effacement, the extenuation of the subject: [. . .] the silent rupture of the fragmentary" (*WD* 14).[15] One risk, however, is that the idea of disaster becomes too disconnected and academic, and ceases to indicate the very real trauma that is experienced by real people. I will work to pull his ideas alongside various texts that deal with trauma in less disembodied ways. Despite this risk, the connection between text and disaster is an interesting one for considering the nature of writing, and how the writing process may at

[13] "sans langage, rien ne se montre. Et se taire, c'est encore parler. Le silence est impossible. C'est pourquoi nous le désirons" (*ED* 23).
[14] "Quand *tout est dit, ce qui reste à dire est le désastre, ruine de parole, défaillance par l'écriture, rumeur qui murmure : ce qui reste sans reste* (le fragmentaire)" (*ED* 58).
[15] "S'il y a rapport entre écriture et passivité, c'est que l'une et l'autre supposent l'effacement, l'exténuation du sujet [. . .] la rupture silencieuse du fragmentaire" (*ED* 29-30).

times resemble the experience of trauma, particularly in the way that each combines destruction and creative potential.

Other works by Blanchot are similarly useful and thought-provoking when exploring works related to trauma. In *La communauté inavouable* (1983), he delves further into the limits between self and other, and how those limits are changed by death. He proposes that exposure to death or absence is necessary for community to exist: "This is what founds community. There could not be a community without the sharing of that first and last event which in everyone ceases to be able to be just that (birth, death)".[16] Death is a fundamental component of community; this may be in spite of or perhaps because death reaffirms the limits between the self and the other: "What, then, calls me into question most radically? Not my relation to myself as finite or as the consciousness of being before death or for death, but my presence for another who absents himself by dying" (*Unavowable Community* 9).[17] In subsequent chapters, particularly the chapter on Edmond Jabès's *Le livre des questions*, I will discuss in depth Blanchot's *L'entretien infini*, which explores questions regarding the fundamental nature of language, silence, and communication. While the ideas found in the work provide rich possibilities for understanding a broad range of texts, I will not dilate upon that text here. While the notion of interruption that he explores has significant connections to his work on disaster and to the idea of trauma in general, it will be essential for my reading of Jabès; I will therefore explore the two in conversation with each other in my second chapter.

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[16] *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, throughout. 9. "Voilà ce qui fonde la communauté. Il ne saurait y avoir de communauté si n'était commun l'événement premier et dernier qui en chacun cesse de pouvoir l'être (naissance, mort)" (*Communauté inavouable* 22).

[17] "Qu'est-ce donc qui me met le plus radicalement en cause? Non pas mon rapport à moi-même comme fini ou comme conscience d'être à la mort ou pour la mort, mais ma présence à autrui en tant que celui-ci s'absente en mourant" (*Communauté inavouable* 21).

Testimony, Trauma, and the Creative Process

While the theoretical ideas surrounding the relationship between trauma and the creative process provide many interesting implications in regards to the place and function of the unspeakable in literature, there is a strong risk of ceasing to understand trauma as what it is, and to engage with it instead in a purely cerebral manner. It is important to balance the often disembodied concepts that I have discussed so far with texts that consider trauma in a more empirical way. The writing of Blanchot, for instance, provides incredibly fertile ground for thought on the connections between writing and trauma through the links of paradox and silence, but it is easy to forget about the real visceral and psychological suffering that trauma necessarily entails. In this section, I will examine a number of works that address more concrete instances of trauma and testimony as a way of grounding the concept of the unspeakable before exploring its presence in literary works. I will focus on the writing of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra, and Berel Lang, all of whom provide powerful scholarship that addresses testimony in terms of the experience of the victim as well as that of the listener or reader.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub discuss what exactly occurs when a victim or witness recounts their experience, and the crisis that can ensue from a victim's inability to synthesize their personal experience with their perception of what constitutes reality. When trauma seems to go beyond the possible, victims may be unable to speak about the events they have experienced or witnessed. At the outset of the book, Felman recounts her class's own crisis as they engaged with testimonial literature and film. I find it interesting that the classroom experience was able to recreate such an environment; the course was presumably not traumatic in a typical physical or

psychological sense, and yet by exposing her students repeatedly to the testimony of others, the classroom experience came to mimic that of testimony. Such inadvertent mimicry illustrates how deeply trauma is bound up in expression, and how language alone is able to draw a person into the performative aspects of testimony. Felman states her goals for the course as follows:

> I had two tentative pedagogical objectives in mind: 1) to make the class feel, and progressively discover, how testimony is indeed *pervasive*, how it is implicated—sometimes unexpectedly—in almost every kind of writing; 2) to make the class feel, on the other hand, and—there again—progressively discover, how the testimony cannot be subsumed by its familiar notion, how the texts that testify do not simply *report facts* but, in different ways, encounter—and make us encounter—*strangeness*. (*Testimony* 7)

Felman focuses here on the experience of hearing or reading testimony, rather than that of giving testimony. The relationship between the listener and the speaker is an uneasy one, as the testimony draws the listener in to an experiential, rather than intellectual, understanding of the victim's experience. She situates testimony as a unique type of language, and yet also as something that can be detected in, as she says, "almost every kind of writing." While this idea connects powerfully to that of Blanchot and the discontinuity that is inherent to both trauma and language, Felman's discussion of it demonstrates what the consequences of such connections can be—in this case, a breakdown in the classroom experience.

Felman and Laub are sensitive to the predominantly linguistic quality of testimony and to the limitations and implications that are therefore bound up in most testimony. Part of the issue involves discerning just what testimony can and cannot be, and what distinguishes it from other forms of writing or speech. In particular, Felman notes the fragmentary and incomplete nature of

testimony: "What the testimony does not offer is, however, a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constatation of a verdict of the self-transparency of knowledge" (5). Felman presents the question of truth as something external to that of experience, which seems to refer to the issue of contextualization. A witness may not be aware of the larger picture surrounding a traumatic incident, but such knowledge is not necessary to testify to that person's own experience within the context. As Felman says, "One does not have to *possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker" (15). The listener may be able to detect the truth of the victim's statement, even if the victim is not. The one deciphering the testimony must therefore engage in a process of interpretation in order to piece together some cohesive view of the truth of what happened. Because testimony is necessarily fragmentary, it makes sense that many authors dealing with trauma engage in formal experimentation that fragments the narrative structure. Blanchot does this in his theoretical works; Jabès and many of the other writers I will explore do the same.

In the chapter "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," Dori Laub also raises important questions about the effect of bearing witness on the victim and on the listener, now from the standpoint of psychoanalysis. He notes the risks involved for the speaker—one, that bearing witness will result in re-living and thus re-experiencing the trauma, and two, that the testimony might remain unheard (*Testimony* 68). As Laub says, "the act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further retraumatization" (67). As for the listener, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a

co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself" (*Testimony* 57). While it is true that the listener does experience something of the trauma, often in the form of empathy, it seems excessive to suggest that the listener becomes "co-owner of the traumatic event;" to do so imparts too much power to words rather than direct experience. Still, it is important to consider the effect that hearing testimony may have on those hearing the experience, and how the listener's experience may in turn affect the victim once again, either because the listener does not adequately hear or understand the testimony, or because the listener empathizes with the victim to such a degree that it effaces the particularity of the original experience.

Laub also notes the primacy of absence or silence in trauma testimony due to the victim's inability to fully digest and comprehend what has happened:

> The listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation… he comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made. Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. (57)

From a psychological standpoint, the victim who testifies to a traumatic event that he or she has suffered or witnessed does not experience the act of telling the way a person normally does. There is no distance or perspective to allow the victim to grasp the event as a whole, in addition to the particular details that he or she can recall. The event is essentially too close, and cannot yet

be comprehended as such, which leaves the listener in the position of reconstructing and interpreting the impressions and experiences of the victim. Overall, the discussions presented by Felman and Laub provide a useful clinical and theoretical understanding of what occurs for the speaker and the listener in the act of testifying about trauma.

Approaching the issue of trauma from a different perspective, and focusing primarily on Holocaust trauma, Dominick LaCapra provides an important, thorough, and sophisticated critical voice to counter what can become a simplistic conversation surrounding the process of dealing with trauma and that of artistic creation. In *History and its Limits* (2009), LaCapra suggests that a listener does a disservice to a victim by identifying too strongly with the victim's testimony. What LaCapra describes as the "conflation of subject positions" of a witness and an interlocutor or commentator can result in the loss of genuine subject identity, blurring the boundaries of self and other in a negative way:

> This conflation of subject positions may well involve the confusion of empathy or compassion with identification. Unlike empathy or compassion, [. . .] identification assimilates or appropriates the experience of the other rather than (as in empathy) responding to it affectively while recognizing the difference or alterity of the other and the distinctiveness of his or her experience (which need not be taken to the extreme of total otherness or the *tout autre*).
>
> ("Traumatropisms," in *Limits*, 65)

As LaCapra notes, it is essential to retain boundaries between the victim and the person hearing the testimony. While empathizing with a victim's position is normal, identifying with the victim to the point of erasing distinctions between individuals and their experiences is unhelpful.

One of the most significant things that LaCapra brings to the table is his close examination of assumptions and superficial connections, engaging with them in a patient, critical way that teases out the complicated relationships between things that may be separated by very little. For example, LaCapra explores ways in which trauma is different from loss or absence, and why such a difference might matter. He also examines the different implications of bearing witness, testimony, and commentary when dealing with a traumatic event. While he recognizes and explores the distinctions among various problematic terms, he resists the temptation to take an all-or-nothing approach that totally invalidates some terms in preference of others. Instead, he tends to lay out the various ways in which each element may be helpful in some cases while still having problematic implications in others. LaCapra also discusses the nature of writing about trauma, and possibilities for how one might best go about doing so. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2000), he notes that to write about something requires a certain distance and definability that is conspicuously absent in cases of trauma:

> Writing trauma is a metaphor in that writing indicates some distance from trauma (even when the experience of writing is itself intimately bound up with trauma), and there is no such thing as writing trauma itself if only because trauma, while at times related to particular events, cannot be localized in terms of a discrete, dated experience. Trauma indicates a shattering break or cesura in experience which has belated effects. (186)

Trauma is thus inherently fragmented, as it represents a rupture in the life of the victim; as such, it is natural that first, the victim would be unable to conceive of the rupture as a separate, isolated event; and second, that any depictions of trauma would almost necessarily include this notion of fragmentation, whether in the form or the content. Finally, LaCapra talks about the most

appropriate ways of writing about trauma, as he perceives it. Neither simply "a documentary or self-sufficient research model," nor "radical constructivism" he discusses the importance of a sort of "middle voice" (*WH* 1). While LaCapra further problematizes this notion of "middle voice" using work by Hayden White and Roland Barthes, the salient components that do seem important to his understanding of an appropriate narrative are free indirect style and what he calls "undecidability of voice" (*WH* 196-97). As LaCapra understands it, then, it would seem that trauma literature walks a balance between historical accuracy (as far as that can be determined) and imagination; to stray too far to one side seems overly authoritative, while the other seems irreverent.

When navigating the differences among trauma, absence, and loss, LaCapra notes the reasons why people may tend toward certain associations: "To blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the post-traumatic, which create a state of disorientation, agitation, or even confusion and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction can be compelling" (*WH,* 46). He clarifies that "without conceiving of it as a binary opposition, I am pointing to the significance, even the relative strength, of the distinction between absence and loss" (*WH* 47). LaCapra recognizes the significance that one element may precede or include the other (loss leads to absence, for instance), but that the inverse may not necessarily be true. Similarly, LaCapra is careful to examine the nuances of what it means to work through loss or absence (as in mourning), and how the result may not be that which is expected: "Acknowledging and affirming, or working through, absence as absence requires the recognition of both the dubious nature of ultimate solutions and the necessary anxiety that cannot be eliminated from the self or projected onto others" (*WH* 58). LaCapra takes a skeptical stance toward what could be seen as a standard view

of mourning as a healing process of "working through" trauma, as established by Freud in opposition to the lingering and unproductive state of melancholia.

LaCapra also examines the differences in various types of post-traumatic linguistic expression, namely "bearing witness, giving testimony, and offering commentary of one sort or another" (*History and its Limits* 61). The distinctions are significant, he argues, because of the varying implications of authority and direct experience in each, but also because of the potential for factual fallibility due to the effects of trauma on memory. LaCapra defines bearing witness as "the act of someone having the experience of an event," which is inarticulate in itself (*Limits* 61). When a witness tells of the experience, it becomes testimony: "the fallible attempt to verbalize or otherwise articulate bearing witness. Testimony is itself both threatened and somehow authenticated or validated insofar as it bears the marks of, while not being utterly consumed and distorted by, the symptomatic effects of trauma" (*Limits* 61). Commentary, then, is removed a step further from the direct experience of the witness, and comprises all other outside accounts of the trauma. Interestingly, proximity to the traumatic event both validates and invalidates the accounts of the witness, for while direct experience allows for a far more personal and vivid understanding of the event, the trauma involved also creates flaws in memory and the ability to tell of what has happened.

In the same chapter, LaCapra also cautions against the desire to speak of trauma in terms of the sublime or the sacred, as such a move aestheticizes trauma in an inappropriate way (*Limits* 68-69). A person's reaction to an account of trauma may be difficult to accurately define, but he makes it clear that such a difficulty nevertheless does not justify applying an aesthetic term to a violent event. When discussing literature after the Holocaust, then, or even literature that deals with trauma more generally, it is important to remain aware of the reality of human experience

that cannot and should not be reduced to aesthetic terms. In my own discussion of literature that follows, I will do my best not merely to aestheticize the real experiences of those who have suffered.

Berel Lang recognizes the same risk of aestheticizing real pain or violence. In his work, he seeks to desacralize violence, particularly the sacrificial implications of the term "Holocaust," noting that he actually prefers the designation "Nazi genocide" (*Future of the Holocaust* xii). Just as LaCapra's writing helps to clarify certain commonly used expressions and undo unhelpful assumptions, Lang also contributes to the discussion of trauma literature and Holocaust representation by questioning certain overused tropes. In particular, he questions the usefulness of deeming the trauma of the Holocaust unspeakable. As he says in *Holocaust Representation* (2000), "Claims that the Holocaust was ‘indescribable’ or ‘ineffable’ have been common; often such claims are themselves figures of speech—hyperbole, metaphor—underscoring moral and historical enormity that is not at all immune, however, to description or analysis or to the artistic imagination" (*HR* 5). He is uncomfortable with a text that describes something as indescribable. Even more clearly, he declares: "I propose at the outset of this discussion, then—and once and for all, if I could—to 'de-figure' this figure of the Holocaust; to claim instead that the Holocaust is speakable, that it has been, will be (certainly here), and, most of all, ought to be spoken" (*HR* 18). While I do not disagree with Lang's premise, I nonetheless think that the notion of the unspeakable—or at the very least, the importance of silence and fragmentation—is an important component of the ways that that the traumatic is verbally expressed. Lang associates silence with forgetfulness (*HR* 19), but when silence is incorporated within text, I believe it has a powerfully expressive quality that leads to enduring memory and emotional engagement rather than forgetting.

Much like Adorno's recantation of his statement regarding the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz, Lang's claims here recognize the existence of two planes of discourse: the literal and the figurative. On the literal level, Holocaust representation is of course possible, and even common; there are a vast number of books on the topic. What is more difficult to define, however, is the meaning of representation or indescribability on the figurative level. The idea that the trauma of the Holocaust was too profound to be relayed in words is a common way of underscoring the depth of the trauma, and yet Lang goes on to demystify the notion of ineffability, even on a figurative level. Rather than simply deeming the event unspeakable, Lang encourages an exploration of how the trauma might result in different means of representation: "If there is characteristically a significant relation between the subject or occasion of representation (in or outside the art world) and the form by which it is expressed, then it would follow that the identifying features of the Holocaust—what makes it distinctive historically and morally—would, and should, also make a difference in the modes of its representation" (*HR* 5). He recognizes that there is a tendency towards experimentation and changes in genre and form for writers dealing with the Holocaust, particularly in regards to the incorporation of silence and indirect representation:

> It is not always the case that artistic achievement is linked to innovation in the forms or genres of art; it has been argued in fact that the largest achievements in modes of representation have typically occurred within established genres and aesthetic conventions since these provide a fulcrum for the artist to move from. But in the case of Holocaust images this has quite plainly *not* been the case, and the reason for this also seems clear: the pressures exerted by their common subject are such that the associations of the *traditional forms* [. . .] *are quite*

> *inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust. Thus the constant turning in Holocaust images to* difference*: to the use of silence as means and metaphor, to obliqueness in representation* that approaches the abstraction of abstract painting without yet conceding its goals, to the uses of allegory and fable and surrealism, to the blurring of traditional genres not just for the sake of undoing them but in the interests of combining certain of their elements that otherwise had been held apart. (*HR* 10, emphasis mine)

So, while Lang resists the easy depiction of the Holocaust as being beyond representation, he does admit to the need for attention to form and experimentation because of the nature of what is being recounted. Part of the difficulty of finding an appropriate form of expression has to do with the anticipated reception of the work. Lang asks, for instance, whether it is appropriate for Holocaust art to be considered beautiful (*HR* 13). At the root of his work in this book is a question regarding how form relates to content: "What concerns me here in philosophical terms is a question *internal* to the institution of art, namely, what difference to the shaping of art's works the ethical and cognitive (in the context here, the historical) presence can or should make, or more concisely, what the moral and historical responsibility of art is" (*HR* 3). When a work of art touches on subject matter that evokes moral responsibility, perhaps something in the form should adequately situate the text so that the reader is aware of it; but perhaps such responsibility is beyond art's grasp.

In fact, the issue of limits is a significant one to Lang's argument. Rather than accepting limits as unbreakable boundaries (beyond which one may find the "unspeakable," for instance), Lang argues that limits actually allow for artistic representation. In his chapter entitled "The

Limits of Representation and the Representation of Limits," Lang asserts: "I refer to the unlikely conjunction of transgression and representation in a strong sense: transgression as a condition for representation" (*HR* 54). He sees the most fundamental limit for all writing as that of silence,

> a silence that emerges as a limit precisely because of the possibility of representation and the risks that the possibility entails. In these terms, silence is a limit for every individual representation or image, establishing the barrier of a simple but universal test. This is the question of whether, in comparison with the voice heard in the representation being considered, silence itself would have been more accurate or truthful or morally responsive. (*HR* 71)

Transgressing this limit of silence is what allows for the possibility of representation—and yet, it seems that the inverse is also true: when silence transgresses the limit of language, there exists a different form of representation. While Lang resists the tendency to label trauma as unrepresentable, by recognizing the significance and necessity of silence as an integral part of representation, he nonetheless works within a similar paradigm as many who do assert a certain unspeakable nature of trauma. Lang's stance makes it clear that in recounting or working through trauma, silence is not the limit of expression, but the avenue for it.

Conclusion

The writers I have discussed, while not an exhaustive list of scholars working in the field of trauma and the unspeakable, inform my readings of the fictional texts that follow in significant ways. As I will make clear in the coming chapters, rather than simply describe silence or difficulty of expression, frequently authors of fiction make the tension between the compulsion to speak and the inability to do so most vivid by experimenting with the form of the text. By

doing so, writers incorporate a more fundamental silence, much like the deep interruption envisaged by Blanchot in *L'entretien infini*. In some cases, the writer him- or herself is the one testifying to a traumatic experience, or mourning the loss of a loved one; in other cases, it is a character created by the writer that does so. Either way, the reader is involved in the process as it unfolds, partly because reading is a necessarily temporal act (just as mourning must be).

Depending on how one understands the text and the act of writing, works of fiction may function differently, both for the writers and their readers. If one grants the writing process a transformative power, recognizing it as a component of Freud's productive mourning process in distinction to the state of melancholy, then each text acts as its own testimony to the process of working through trauma. If one focuses on the ways in which the unspeakable manifests itself in the mourning process, then various instances of silence and fragmentation become apparent. If the text is only seen as a way of representing reality, then each work demonstrates the subjective reality of its writer. Those are all possibilities that I will explore in the chapters that follow.

III. Survivors' Guilt and Unanswerable Questions: Edmond Jabès

Edmond Jabès's writing, with its provocative contradictions and captivating rhythm, has sparked a remarkably thoughtful corpus of interpretation from a variety of writers and scholars. There is little wonder why: his work combines themes of great importance with an interrogative and often self-contradictory approach that simultaneously elicits and resists interpretation. His enigmatic writing thus sparks a great deal of thought and critical analysis as readers work to explore the richness therein, but the same characteristics of his writing that inspire thought and interpretation also make such critical work extremely difficult, often eluding or contradicting the reader's initial ideas and impressions. Jabès writes from a complex personal background: born in 1912 to a French-speaking Jewish family in Cairo, Egypt, Jabès later lived as an exile in Paris from 1957 until his death in 1991. Jewish by heritage though not by belief, he was not directly touched by the events of World War II, and yet the Shoah exerts a profound influence on his work. He lived in exile in a country where his native language was fluently spoken, and yet he held Italian citizenship. The complexities of Jabès's personal background find their echo in his writing, where tensions and contradictions coexist without resolution. Jabès's work is highly suggestive in its style, its context, and its means of opening possibilities without overdetermining them. Nothing is pinpointed in a definitive way; connections are made and erased, everything is a question that raises new questions, and the infinite and nothingness blend together in a space of possibility and limitation. Clusters of words and ideas become important not so much because of a linear argument, but because of their tendency to recur, albeit in various guises. The book and the word themselves are part of the fundamental questioning; related to them are notions of the infinite, in that interpretation and questioning can continue perpetually, resulting in an unending

text. The infinite is in turn suggested in a variety of ways: as the desert, the blank page, God, and death.

In this chapter I will focus on *Le livre des questions* (1963-1973),[18] particularly the first three of the seven volumes, in which trauma is continually present through the partially told story of a young couple, Sarah and Yukel, who survived the concentration camps. While the work as a whole further develops the ideas of trauma, identity, and the word, the focus in the fourth and later volumes shifts away from the story of Sarah and Yukel and introduces a new set of narrators and thematic elements. What holds true in all seven volumes are the pervasive connections among writing, Judaism, and trauma. Throughout this chapter, I will explore the relationships among these three elements; the manners in which Jabès crafts the connections, including questioning, ambiguity, and paradox; and the impact of trauma's various guises on language and identity. Underlying all of these elements is an undercurrent of the unspeakable—that which is beyond language or impossible to express in language.

It is difficult to separate the various concepts of *Le livre des questions* cleanly, as their edges bleed together and make it nearly impossible to refer to one element without recourse to the others. Loss and mourning in particular enter Jabès's work on a number of levels: at the basic level of the letter or the word, where he explores affinities between words like *l'amour* and *la mort*; at the level of the story that seems to unfold between Sarah and Yukel in the first three volumes; and at a conceptual level, where trauma is understood as being intrinsically linked to writing and to heritage.[19] Trauma is multiple from the outset, and connects not only to writing,

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[18] The title *Le livre des questions* refers both to the seven-volume work as a whole, and also to the first volume of that work, which was published in 1963. The other volumes are as follows: *Le livre de Yukel* (1964), *Le retour au livre* (1965), *Yaël* (1967), *Elya* (1969), *Aely* (1972), and *El, ou le dernier livre* (1973). Yaël, Elya, and Aely become the focal point of the volumes titled as such.

[19] Indeed, as is evident from the structure of Warren Motte's *Questioning Edmond Jabès* (1990) which takes "The Letter," "The Word," "The Story," and "The Book" as the focal points of four subsequent chapters, these various levels of meaning and language are constantly at play in the work of Jabès.

but also to history. In one sense it is a negation of trauma—that of not having been affected by the Holocaust, as was Jabès's own situation, and the subsequent guilt or uneasiness resulting from this situation. For the character Yukel, the trauma of having survived the camps that where Sarah went insane is unbearable. Though the progression of events is not at all linear or definitive, there is still a strong suggestion that Yukel eventually commits suicide. The trauma that devastated the Jews was rooted in arbitrariness; it was arbitrary, too, that some remained unscathed. Because of this arbitrariness, Jabès is working from a place where concrete answers are impossible. Beyond these specific and literal iterations of trauma, Jabès also links it to the roots of Judaism, through the symbolic wound of circumcision and the cycles of exile and persecution. Finally, the trauma he discusses is not only personal or even cultural, but also figurative, pervasive, and universal, at the heart of writing itself. In this case, the wound is depicted as the black ink marring the white page.

As with trauma, Jabès likewise sketches the unsayable in multiple ways. First, the unspeakable takes shape the formulation of unanswered questions. Where responses would be inadequate or impossible, Jabès provides none, focusing instead on the importance of the question. Similarly, oblique and allusive connections or seemingly contradictory statements also serve to open spaces for that which is not said. These stylistic elements are set within a large amount of white space on the page as well, which slows the pace of reading and creates a sense of silence among the printed words. A variety of images suggesting blankness—including the desert and imprisonment—also help flesh out the idea of significant absence. Finally, the scream that Sarah utters in her madness is included as a more visceral figuration of the unsayable, for it is a depiction of nonlinguistic but insistent emotional response to the traumatic experience of the Holocaust. The scream represents an immediate physical and emotional response that is not

bound up in language. By allowing space for that which cannot be defined by words, Jabès creates room for indeterminacy that retains meaningfulness, while not eliminating the fundamental uncertainty at the root of his project.

While all seven volumes of Jabès's enigmatic work, *Le livre des questions,* have informed my reading, I will pay particular attention to the first three volumes in order to focus on the story of Sarah and Yukel, and also on the ways in which the two characters both tell their stories and leave them shrouded in silence. In this first tripartite subset of the work as a whole, Jabès explores the complex relationships among the concepts mentioned above—trauma, Judaism, and writing—, each of which depends inextricably on the others. His work is filled with subtle examples of accepting the complexity of life even in the midst of pain. Jabès does not flee from paradox; on the contrary, he elevates it to a position of prominence with unnerving frequency. By focusing his attention on questioning, paradox, and ambiguity, Jabès creates an environment that nurtures uncertainty and allows for pain as an integral part of life.

At the outset of *Le livre des questions*, Jabès introduces two fundamental elements: the name, and the scream. The two primary characters, Sarah and Yukel, bring up both ideas in a sort of dialogue via their journals. Yukel's journal reads, "I gave you my name, Sarah. And it is a dead end road" (*BQ* 15, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop throughout).[20] Naming is presented as both intimate and problematic, for Yukel suggests that she will not be able to escape the route that it sets her on. The French "*voie,*" translated here as "road," also suggests its homonym, "*voix*," the voice. Sarah's journal, then, presents the emotional immediacy of a scream or cry. "I scream. I scream, Yukel. We are the innocence of the scream" (*BQ* 15).[21] The identity of each character is bound up in that of the other; Yukel depicts this through the formal, given identity of a name,

[20] "Je t'ai donné mon nom, Sarah, et c'est une voie sans issue" (*LQ* 17).
[21] "Je crie. Je crie, Yukel. Nous sommes l'innocence du cri" (*LQ* 17).

which implies a linguistic label used to represent one's identity, while Sarah emphasizes the nonlinguistic urgency and even innocence of the pure sound of the scream. This chapter examines the ways in which these components of naming, pain, and identity function as components of trauma in a way that raises many more questions than it ever hopes to answer.

Trauma at the Root of Story, Writing, and Judaism

Each volume of *Le livre des questions* contains preliminary chapters (with titles such as "At the Threshold of the Book" in *Le livre des questions*; "Forespeech" in *Le livre de Yukel*, etc.),[22] which immediately call into question the precise location of each volume's starting point, as well as the conceptual boundaries of any book. These designated pre-beginnings, which mainly consist of dedications, quotations, and aphorisms from fictional rabbis, are both part of the book and outside of it; they constitute a framework that suggests how the reader might approach the work. As such, the ideas that they contain are of particular interest, for they provide a reflection on the nature of the work itself. Even before the very first volume fully begins ("At the Threshold of the Book," as Jabès puts it), the notion of a fundamental wound is introduced: "Mark the first page of the book with a red marker. For, in the beginning, the wound is invisible" (*BQ* 13).[23] Trauma is thus immediately linked to storytelling, invisibly present from the beginning of the process—even a force that contributes to its creation. Indeed, the narrator later envisions the wound as a sort of well, providing inspiration for the story (*LQ* 65). Trauma is also present throughout the entirety of the work, as narrative is described as having the power to give voice to pain and to increase awareness of trauma; the story is described as "Becoming aware of

[22] "Au seuil du livre;" "Avant-dire."
[23] "Marque d'un signet rouge la première page du livre," says the fictional rabbi Reb Alcé, "car la blessure est invisible à son commencement" (*LQ* 15).

the scream" (*BQ* 16).[24] The narrative is not about events or characters, but rather about becoming aware of the scream underlying the events. On another level, writing itself is also deeply linked with trauma—so much so that they seem at times to be interchangeable, as if they were two sides of one coin: "And I think, I speak for you. I choose and cadence. / For I am writing / and you are the wound" (*BQ* 33).[25] If writing is the means used to become aware of trauma, to be its spokesperson after having been inspired by it to tell its story, then writing will constantly be both a way of processing pain and a renewal of the experience of that pain. Overcoming suffering in the sense of eliminating it is not only impossible, it is also undesirable, for such a sacrifice would cut into the heart of writing itself.

As with writing, Jabès also describes Judaism as being rooted in trauma, and draws various connections between writing and his heritage. The two share a common pain from their beginnings and into their common future: "There is nothing at the threshold of the open page, it seems, but this wound of a race born of the book [. . .]. Nothing but this pain, whose past and whose permanence is also that of writing" (*BQ* 25-26).[26] Judaism and writing are thus perpetually bound up with suffering, the past, and the future, all blending together and becoming indistinguishable. Through the understanding of trauma as being fundamental to Jewish heritage, Jabès is able to attribute significance to the wound that is not otherwise evident in its relationship with writing: that of creating a shared identity. When questioned on his beliefs, the narrator (presumably Yukel) asserts the veracity of his faith by referencing his wound: "I have the wound of the Jew. I was circumcised, as you were, on the eighth day after my birth. I am a Jew, as you

[24] "La prise de conscience d'un cri" (*LQ* 18).
[25] "Et c'est moi qui pense, qui parle pour toi, qui cherche et qui cadence; / car je suis écriture / et toi blessure" (*LQ* 38).
[26] "Rien, apparemment, au seuil de la page ouverte, que cette blessure retrouvée d'une race issue du livre [. . .]. Rien que cette douleur dont le passé et la continuité se confondent avec ceux de l'écriture" (*LQ* 30).

are, in each of my wounds" (*BQ* 61).[27] The scar of a trauma is not to be effaced, but remembered and honored; it provides a common understanding of past pain, and also a mutual hope for the future, linking one person to another in a bond of community. Yukel is joined to those questioning him by his scars. Jabès asserts that writing provides a similar unification, suggesting that it, too, functions as a wound does: "The book chains us together," he states simply (*BQ* 72).[28] Such a connection, whether of blood or ink, is not to be taken lightly, and Jabès emphasizes the preternatural weightiness of both: "A blood stain, an ink stain, weigh more than a ton of corn" (*BQ* 127).[29] They are heavy because they both tap into shared suffering and hope from collective memory and history.

The wound of Judaism is not only present in the deliberate mark of circumcision, but also in the painful history of exile, and most acutely in the horrors of the Holocaust. The wound is thus an identifier for those of Jewish heritage, and also a very real and traumatic element that marks them not only individually, but also collectively. The story of Sarah and Yukel provides a glimpse at one example of the results of the Holocaust, not on a global scale but on a personal one. Jabès discusses the story of Sarah and Yukel and the effects of Auschwitz in *Du désert au livre,* in which he is interviewed by Marcel Cohen. One fundamental element of Sarah and Yukel's story is the urgency and necessity of expression following the trauma. In contrast to Theodor Adorno, who notably proclaimed poetry after Auschwitz to be "barbaric" (*Prisms* 34), Jabès finds poetry after Auschwitz not only to be possible, but essential. As he remarks, "To Adorno's statement that 'after Auschwitz one can no longer write poetry,' inviting a global questioning of our culture, I'm tempted to answer: yes, one can. And, furthermore, one has to.

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[27] "J'ai, du Juif, la blessure. J'ai été, comme toi, circoncis le huitième jour de ma naissance. Je suis Juif, comme toi, par chacune de mes blessures" (*LQ* 68).
[28] "Le livre nous lie" (*LQ* 81).
[29] "Une tache de sang, une tache d'encre pèsent davantage qu'une tonne de maïs" (*LQ* 142).

One has to write out of that break, out of that unceasingly revived wound" (*DB* 62, trans. Pierre Joris throughout).[30] Adorno later recanted his statement, remarking that "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems," which gives a similar sense of inevitability of expression in the midst of trauma, though here from the victim rather than a witness (*Negative Dialectics* 362). Still, while Jabès does assert the necessity of writing following such vast catastrophe, he also comments on the fragmentary nature of Sarah and Yukel's story, for rather than a complete narrative, the reader perceives a series of glimpses into their world: "As far as the story of Sarah and Yukel is concerned, there was no need to tell it. That's why it remains so fragmentary. Their personal biography is so crushed by the scope of the historical drama—the murder of six million men, women and children—that it cannot reflect it at all" (*DB* 47).[31] Here, then, is another tension: the story of Sarah and Yukel must be told, just as Sarah must scream, and yet there is neither need nor even possibility of telling their full story, as it pales in comparison to the historical trauma of which they were a very small part.

Despite the poignancy of Jabès's fragmented suggestions of the horrors suffered in the Holocaust by one particular couple (and, by extension, all others who experienced the same), some have criticized his manner of conflating various specific traumas into one amorphous pain. Berel Lang in particular takes issue with Jabès's efforts to locate the nexus of both Jewish identity and trauma in impossibility and questioning. He recognizes that Jabès's work is not an attempt to recount faithfully the events of the Holocaust; that it is rather an endeavor to embody

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[30] "A l'affirmation d'Adorno : 'On ne peut plus écrire de poésie après Auschwitz' qui nous invite à une remise en cause globale de notre culture, je serais tenté de répondre : oui, on le peut. Et, même, on le doit. Il faut écrire à partir de cette cassure, de cette blessure sans cesse ravivée" (*DL* 93).

[31] "L'histoire de Sarah et de Yukel, quant à elle, n'avait nul besoin d'être contée. C'est pourquoi elle reste si fragmentaire. Leur biographie réelle est tellement écrasée par l'ampleur du drame historique—le meurtre de six millions d'hommes, de femmes, d'enfants—qu'elle ne les reflète plus du tout" (*DL* 75).

the essence of the pain in the pages of a book. Lang refers to it as "Writing-the-Holocaust," but he does not think that Jabès succeeds:

> And if Jewish history as it expresses itself is linked in *The Book of Questions* to a conception or even a theory of the word that *provides* the voice, then the two of them together—not simply the analogy but its content as well—must also be recognizable, persuade the reader that it is indeed they who are present. And it is here that *The Book of Questions*—now the event of Writing-the-Holocaust—misleads the reader and that Jabès, as medium if not as author, fails. (197)

Where Jabès focuses on enigma, the silence of God, and the perpetual questioning of Talmudic scholars in the history of Judaism, Lang is quick to point out the simple declarative nature of many of the biblical writers: "The prose style of the Hebrew Bible is itself as far removed from tentativeness or the anxiety of a contingent existence (and from Jabès's prose) as any text in the history of writing" (201). Though Lang understands Jabès's method of working with the Holocaust in an oblique way, he ultimately finds the text lacking: "It would be difficult to deny, moreover—within this thesis or independently of it—that the Holocaust is something to be dissolved in generalization, to be woven into one text through many others. But this in the end is just what Jabès does" (205). Whether poetry after Auschwitz is possible is no longer the question for Lang, but a moral obligation still persists, and he does not find that Jabès grasps it.

While Lang's criticisms bring up the important question of moral obligation when writing about the Holocaust and the need to consider not just the conceptual elements but also the literal horrors endured, I do not ultimately find his argument to be compelling in relation to Jabès's writing, as it seems to examine *Le livre des questions* on terms other than its own. Jabès's work cannot be said to be lacking in sensitivity; on the contrary, the depiction of the scream as the

embodiment of all unspeakable pain presents the fullness of trauma without trying to reduce it to language. Jabès's work blends the specificity of Sarah and Yukel's story with the patterns and history of the Jewish tradition, and doing so does not weaken the text. Quite the opposite: rather than generalize, as Lang suggests, it adds richness and a certain form of context to the experiences of the two young characters. The lack of determinacy in the text does not cause the project to fail, but rather enables the work to maintain open spaces and questions where answers would simply not be possible.

By writing not only about a specific story taking place at a particular time (albeit in an oblique way), but also about timeless and conceptual matters, Jabès allows the reader to be constantly aware of the past, present, and future in the lives of the characters and in the Jewish tradition. With writing and heritage both simultaneously harking back to origins and forward to hopes, time takes on a cyclical quality rather than being strictly linear. Jabès makes it clear that not only is trauma a starting point, it is also the final point toward which all life advances. As such, it cannot be avoided, regardless of whether one embraces or resists it. Trauma cannot be forgotten because it holds the keys to a shared past; it must be doubly remembered because death is the shared future for all. In response to the question "*Where are you going?*" comes the reply, "*To the well of my childhood. And the way there is death*" (*BQ* 121, italics in original).[32] The wound is again referenced as a well, something that quenches thirst and sustains life. Here it is also connected to the life cycle in another way, both in birth and in death. The rabbi walks the road toward birth and death willingly, but even if it were not so, there would be no other possibility. No matter what a person's intention, initial and final trauma will always be the destination, guiding the person in an inevitable cycle: "whether lying down or standing, [man]

[32] "*Où vas-tu? —Vers le puits de mon enfance et ce chemin est celui de la mort*" (*LQ* 135).

turns in circles like the hands of the clock—unaware that they are turning" (*BQ* 135).[33] Ultimately, Jabès makes it clear that there is simply no way of getting around the fact that life includes death; by connecting the life cycle to the circular path of the hands of a clock, he even undoes the primacy of one over the other, with each instead constantly moving toward the other's reign. He paints it almost as a love relationship: "I need you as life needs death in order to be reborn, and as death needs life in order to die" (*BQ* 134).[34] By creating a paradigm in which contrary ideas are complementary facets of like, rather than opposing, forces, Jabès destabilizes the reader's assumptions and creates an opening for a variety of such tensions to coexist; by rooting this paradigm in the wound, he asserts that trauma must never be far from the reader's mind.

Contradiction as Foundation

As seen in the connection between life and death explored in the previous section, one of the salient traits of *Le livre des questions* is the manner in which Jabès brings together seemingly contradictory images in order to encourage the reader to reconsider expectations. The movement is not unlike that of metaphor, but the fashion in which Jabès carries it out leaves far more room for ambiguity and shifting references than is typically found in metaphor. Rosmarie Waldrop, Jabès's translator, refers to this as "the *gesture* of analogy rather than one specific analogy" (*Lavish Absence* 86). By juxtaposing opposing ideas in ways that reduce their antagonism, Jabès creates an opening for the reader to recognize the complementary workings of forces that ordinarily seem antithetical. He gives a sense of inevitability of the existence of opposing elements, and thereby encourages the reader to accept the unsettling possibility of allowing both

[33] "étendu ou debout, [l'homme] avance, il tourne en rond comme les aiguilles du temps, qui ignorent qu'elles tournent" (*LQ* 152).
[34] "J'ai besoin de toi, comme la vie a besoin de la mort pour renaître, et la mort, de la vie pour mourir" (*LQ* 152).

to exist without having to decide between them. In *Du désert au livre*, Jabès explicitly notes the contradictions that are common in the book; he remarks that he does not deliberately contradict himself, but rather finds it natural to do so, partly because of the contradictions present in the words of God according to Jewish tradition. As Jacques Derrida remarks in "Edmond Jabès et la question du livre,"[35] contradictions "ceaselessly tear apart the pages of the *Livre des questions*, and necessarily tear them apart: God contradicts himself already" (*W&D* 70).[36] Indeed, the contradictory nature of Jabès's writing becomes a main thread of coherence, which he recognizes: "You are crediting me with intention: the intention of being contradictory. I am not voluntarily contradictory, but naturally so. All in all, I accept my contradictions, otherwise my books would seem to me to partake of the lie, the artificial. If there is a coherence in my books, it is due only to the continuity of my contradictions" (*DB* 110).[37] Bringing together opposing ideas or images results in a delicate balance, according to Jabès. For this reason, he writes of the desire "to recover, after each blow, the original balance of life and death" (*BQ* 56).[38] One difficulty in maintaining this equilibrium, though, is that the distinctions between life and death are not always as clear as one might expect. Writing is partly at fault for the blurring of lines. Jabès speaks of using writing to soften the edges between normally distinct elements: "I have erased, in my books, the borderline of life and death" (*BQ* 58).[39] Perhaps writing achieves this feat by blurring the boundaries between past and present, or between reality and imagination. At many points in Jabès's writing it is difficult for the reader to be certain about who the narrator is (the

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[35] "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," from *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. I will use Bass's translation throughout.

[36] "sans cesse déchirent les pages du *Livre des questions*; les déchirent nécessairement : Dieu déjà se contredit" (*ED* 106-07).

[37] "Vous me prêtez une intention : celle d'être contradictoire. Je ne suis pas volontairement contradictoire, je le suis naturellement. En somme, j'accepte mes contradictions, faute de quoi mes livres me paraîtraient basculer dans le mensonge, le fabriqué. S'il y a une cohérence dans mes livres elle n'est due qu'à la continuité de mes contradictions" (*DL* 152).

[38] "rétablir, à chaque épreuve, l'équilibre originel entre la vie et la mort" (*LQ* 62).

[39] "J'ai aboli, dans mes livres, les frontières de la vie et de la mort" (*LQ* 65).

perspective often seems to be that of Jabès himself, and even Yukel's narrative voice shifts between Yukel as character and Yukel as writer). Determining the dividing line between fact and fiction, therefore, is not easy, nor is it easy to be sure about the chronology of events such as Yukel's suicide, or whether such events even occur. Elements of a text such as narrative voice and plot are frequently some of the clearest to decipher, so by making them murkier in *Le livre des questions*, Jabès suggests that even the most fundamental components must be called into question.

Eliminating borders is risky business, though, as limitless space can provide freedom, but can also entrap by making progress or decisions seem insignificant or irrelevant. One complex set of contradictory ideas that Jabès coaxes into harmonious relationship centers on the idea of blankness, both literal and figurative, and its possibilities of imprisonment and liberation. Blankness takes on a variety of forms in Jabès's work. As a writer, the most daunting blankness may be that of a blank page threatening failure; as a Jew, it may be the barrenness of the desert and the lingering fear of wandering and exile. Both appear prominently in the book not only as menaces, but also as unlikely prisons. Pure blankness can be more confining than a brick-and-mortar prison, as it undermines the human need for limits and boundaries; when none exist, limitless possibility can have a paralyzing effect. As Jabès asks, how can a person conquer the nothingness of the desert? There is nothing to destroy: "living means acknowledging one's limits [. . .]. What can you do against a wall? You tear it down. What can you do against bars? You file them. But a wall of sand? Bars which are our shadows on sand?" (*BQ* 56).[40] Furthermore, the desert's vastness makes any progress irrelevant, as none is visibly apparent. Freedom, instead, is to be found in the confines of the familiar, "for only within our four walls are we really free" (*BQ*

[40] "vivre c'est affirmer ses limites [. . .]. Que peut-on contre un mur sinon l'abattre? Que peut-on contre les barreaux sinon les scier? Mais contre un mur qui est le sable? Mais contre des barreaux qui sont notre ombre sur le sable?" (*LQ* 61).

74).[41] To combat the captivity of open space, Jabès suggests that humanity seeks refuge in creating borders, to the point that establishing limits becomes synonymous with life: "To build walls, is that not living?" (*BQ* 96).[42] The human desire to establish a defined space of home and comfort is strong, and Jabès recognizes the legitimacy of the quest to ease the anxiety of too few limits.

Still, despite their potential for imposing confinement through their very openness, the infinite possibilities of the blank page and of the uncharted desert can in many ways be considered emancipatory, allowing the writer and the wanderer to choose their own paths. The blankness is simultaneously freeing and confining, just as the body is depicted both as a form of imprisonment and as life-sustaining: "Our breast is a jail [. . .]. Our ribs are the bars which keep us from suffocating" (*BQ* 84).[43] Jabès likewise recognizes the dual nature of blankness which includes its potential freedom; he places great value on the process of searching that such an environment enables. Faced with a blank page, the writer must ask: "Where is the path? It must each time be discovered anew. A blank sheet is full of paths" (*BQ* 54).[44] The desert forces similar searching, even to a greater degree, for one's path is always at risk of erasure: "At noon, he found himself facing the infinite, the blank page. All tracks, footprints, paths were gone. Buried" (*BQ* 55).[45] With all of his footsteps washed away in the heat of the noon sun, the risk inherent in this particular blankness is immediate and physical. Still, Jabès does not suggest a more prudent path. As Jabès may never write a definite answer to any of the questions he poses, still the gesture of circling around those questions and ideas is one of meaning and value. The risk one encounters

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[41] "nous ne sommes vraiment libres qu'entre nos quatre murs" (*LQ* 83).
[42] "Élever des murs, n'est-ce pas vivre?" (*LQ* 108).
[43] "Nos poitrines sont nos geôles [. . .] Nos côtes sont les barreaux qui nous empêchent d'étouffer" (*LQ* 95).
[44] "Où est le chemin? Le chemin est toujours à trouver. Une feuille blanche est remplie de chemins" (*LQ* 59).
[45] "Il s'était retrouvé, à midi, face à l'infini, à la page blanche. Toute trace de pas, la piste avaient disparu. Ensevelies" (*LQ* 60).

by eliminating boundaries is an important one to take, for by moving toward blankness and infinite potential, Jabès can create a space of questioning, which he prioritizes over knowledge. The closest thing to knowledge may be asking the right questions in the best possible order, which Jabès suggests separates the student from the teacher. One reason that Jabès focuses on questioning rather than on obtaining knowledge is his sense that absolute understanding can be present in a sense of nothingness as well as in a sense of totality. He depicts the two as necessary counterparts to one another: "True knowledge is daily awareness that, in the end, one learns nothing. The Nothing is also knowledge, being the reverse of the All, as the air is the reverse of the wing" (*BQ* 117).[46] Even God is portrayed as a question rather than a response to questioning: "God is a question, [. . .] a question which leads us to Him who is Light through and for us, who are nothing" (*BQ* 117).[47] This acceptance of unanswered questions and of unresolved contradiction is ultimately Jabès's overarching strategy for coping with trauma. By acknowledging the necessity of trauma as fundamental both to writing and to Jewish heritage, and by recognizing the intrinsic duality of such essential forces as life and divinity, Jabès enigmatically encourages acceptance of suffering as essential to truth and identity.

While blankness as a starting point provides innumerable possibilities, Jabès also suggests that true meaning requires more—namely, a wound or mark on the surface of that blankness. Using the imagery of a lake surface, either smooth or rippled, he asserts the beauty of wounds: "'*What is the water in a lake? A blank page. The ripples are its wrinkles. And every one is a wound. A lake without ripples is a mirror. A wrinkled lake is a face. In their markings, our*

[46] "La véritable connaissance, c'est de savoir chaque jour que l'on n'apprendra, en fin de compte, rien; car le Rien est aussi connaissance étant l'envers du Tout, comme l'air est l'envers de l'aile" (*LQ* 130).
[47] "Dieu est une question, [. . .] une question qui nous conduit à Lui qui est Lumière par nous, pour nous qui ne sommes rien" (*LQ* 130).

faces reflect God's" (*BQ* 83).[48] Jabès does not want to remain perpetually in front of a blank page; writing or the wound must mar the pure surface in order for understanding and transformation to take place. The ink can be seen as the wound on the white page, but in a reversal of the image, the blank spaces or silences are also envisioned as wounds to the text, as in this passage in *Aely*: "Oury said: '*The Book of Questions* is from beginning to end interrupted in its unfolding. Each interruption is a cut. Gaping white wounds. Modesty of the page" (*YEA* 261).[49] Here, rather than the text being seen as a mark that interrupts the smooth uniformity of the blank page, the silences are understood as interrupting the fluidity of the text. The sign appears as wound: "*Before and after the word comes the sign / and, in the sign, the void where we grow. / Only the sign can be seen, being a wound. / But the eyes lie*" (*BQ* 85).[50] This passage hints at the complication: the sign here does not seem to indicate the word, but the space or silence before and after the word. The sign, though, is all that is visible, which would seem to indicate that it is rather the printed word than the empty space. One way to understand the blurring of whether the sign refers to the words or the space around them is to minimize the perceived difference of the two elements: if both word and empty space are signifiers, then either may be meaningful at any given moment. In the passage above, emptiness is the focus and draws the eye of the reader. Still, though, the final note that "the eyes lie" (as in Waldrop's translation, 85) makes it clear that the visual response cannot be trusted, and that one can perhaps take the place of the other. If both text and white space are alternately seen as inflicting trauma, then the printed book seems to layer one wound on top of another in inspiration, content, and form.

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[48] "*—Qu'est-ce que l'eau du lac? Une page blanche. Les plis sont ses rides et chacune est une blessure. Un lac sans plis est un miroir. Un lac ridé est un visage. Marqués, nos visages reflètent celui de Dieu*" (*LQ* 94).
[49] "Et Oury dit : '*Le livre des questions* est, de bout en bout, interrompu dans son déploiement. L'interruption est l'entaille. Béante, la blessure est blanche. Pudeur du feuillet'" (*A* 75).
[50] "*Avant et après la parole, il y a le signe, / et, dans le signe, le vide où nous croissons. / Ainsi, étant blessure, seul le signe est visible. / Mais l'œil ment*" (*LQ* 96).

Taking into consideration the way that Jabès discusses both blankness and the marks inflicted on that empty space, the relationship between the page and the words printed there is a complicated one. The unmarked Saharan sand, figured both as a dangerous site of potential entrapment and as a space of openness essential to the act of questioning, suggests a blank page that has not yet been filled with words. The desert, as the blank page, enables the possibility of various paths, choices, and narratives to play out once someone begins to mark the pristine surface. Even this image, though, is not fixed, but shifts as Jabès writes about it. Words would seem to diminish the blankness of the white page, but even the finished book, once all pages have been filled, is at times conceived of as blank: "The book is the blank space of sleep" (*BQ* 111).[51] This suggests the infinite potential not only of the page before it contains words, but also after, as textual interpretation can take any number of directions. Jabès's project frequently works with the idea of a total book, as is present in both the Kabbalistic tradition as well as in the writing of Stéphane Mallarmé and Jorge Luis Borges. With this idea in mind, the printed book cannot merely be limitation of possibility, but must also be openness. Jabès's work does indeed invite interpretation and continued questioning, which enables it to keep growing, perhaps endlessly. The vast potential of interpretation that follows writing echoes the rabbinic discussion of the sacred texts in Jewish tradition; not only are the words important, but also the continued reflection upon them. In "'Torments of an Ancient Word': Edmond Jabès and the Rabbinic Tradition," Susan Handelman discusses the elements of Jewish scholarship that Jabès incorporates into his work. Already within the idea of the written and oral Torah is the idea of an infinite book, for the sacred text is both a work of divine completion, and a never ending work in progress fleshed out by the scholarship and discussion of rabbis:

[51] "Le livre est l'espace blanc du sommeil" (*LQ* 123).

> In the rabbinic view, then, the Written Torah is only a partial revelation. The "Book of Books" is fragmentary, enigmatic, incomplete, and meant to be accompanied by the Oral Torah, without which it is incomprehensible. At the same time, however, the Written Torah is considered to be utterly authoritative and divine. This paradox makes it at once perfect and incomplete, full of meaning and lacking meaning, venerated and yet manipulated. (Handelman 61)

Handelman's understanding of Jewish scholarship and tradition provides an invaluable glimpse into the structure and rhythm of Jabès's work as well, but for the moment I will focus only on her suggestion of the constant re-working of the text. Within *Le livre des questions*, then, Jabès uses the image of the blank page or the potential erasure of footsteps in the desert to suggest the unending potential for continued interpretation.

Absence of God, or God as Absence

Just as blankness can be both confining and liberating, the notion of possibility is illustrated both in the infinite and the absent. Jabès writes frequently of God, but not always the God of Hebrew scriptures; at times God instead seems to be a way of understanding the self, the writer, the infinite, or other possibilities. As such, Jabès frequently depicts the silence, absence, or death of God, perhaps suggesting that only by such absolute negations can it be possible to understand something so radically other and infinite. The text likens the language of God not to any other language, but to silence: "'If I spoke the language of God,' Yukel continued, 'Men would not hear me. For He is the silence of all words'" (*BQ* 255).[52] The unspeakable nature of the Tetragrammaton underlies the idea of God's silence: just as the name of God cannot be

[52] "Si je parlais la langue de Dieu, reprit Yukel, les hommes ne m'entendraient pas; car Il est le silence de toute parole" (*LQ* 288).

spoken because of its unfathomable otherness, so the language of God can only be understood as silence. This silence, though, creates a space for interpreting the written words of God.

Indeed, the absence of God is a central trope in Jabès's suggested comparisons between Judaism and writing. Jabès writes of a sort of death of God that does not destroy Judaism, but rather displaces the emphasis of his Judaism into the Word and the Book. He writes in *Elya:* "So, with God dead, I found my Jewishness confirmed in the book, at the predestined spot where it came upon its face, the saddest, most unconsoled that man can have" (*YEA* 143).[53] In a later passage, he writes, "One writes before or after God" (*YEA* 148).[54] His is indeed a "Judaism after God," as he discusses in *Du désert au livre*. He describes the words "Jew" and "God" as metaphors: "'God' is the metaphor for emptiness; 'Jew' stands for the torment of God, of emptiness" (*DB* 57).[55] He emphasizes the importance of the traditions of Judaism in creating a Jewish identity, rather than the real existence of God (*DB* 88). This, for Jabès, is the foundation of "Judaism after God": "Whether or not God exists, is not, in fact, the essential question. It is first of all to himself—and the tradition has always insisted on the importance of free choice—that the Jew has to answer for the fate of the values he has taken upon himself to spread" (*DB* 58).[56] The absence of God creates a fundamental rupture and silence in the heart of Judaism, and it is this rupture that allows space for interpretation.

Similarly, in response to Marcel Cohen's question as to why, as an atheist, Jabès chose to capitalize the word "*Dieu,*" Jabès replied that he decided it was necessary because as he says, "what I was confronted with was the absence of capitalized God and not the concept of god. This

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[53] "Donc, Dieu mort, ma judaïcité se trouvait confirmée dans le livre, à la place prédestinée où elle s'était soudain heurtée à son visage, au plus désolé, au plus inconsolé de l'homme" (*E* 40-41).
[54] "On écrit avant ou après Dieu" (*E* 48).
[55] "'Dieu', métaphore du vide; 'juif' tourment de Dieu, du vide" (*DL* 87).
[56] "Judaïsme après Dieu: "Que Dieu existe ou non ne serait pas, en fait, la question essentielle. C'est à lui-même—et la tradition a toujours insisté sur l'importance du libre arbitre—que le juif doit d'abord rendre compte du sort des valeus qu'il s'est engagé à répandre" (*DL* 88).

absence slowly became ABSENCE, our absence to ourselves, the absence of origin which is the root of all creation. The abyss, in fact" (*DB* 72).[57] By using a concept of God to convey a spectrum of meanings, one of which is absence, Jabès attempts to navigate the very real difficulty of destroying silence by speaking of it or within it. The absence of God signals the unfathomable alterity between the human and the divine, which can never be breached, partly because the Other, in his absence, can never be known.

God's role as creator creates the possibility of drawing a parallel between God and the author, whom Jabès also describes as absent at various points. In *Yaël*, the absence of God is connected to falsehood, which by extension suggests all language and metaphor:

> "All I [Yaël] care for: to live the absence of God.
>
> "God went into exile and left it to man to unseal the world. I shall be all the lies of God in order to die of His death.
>
> "For God died of lying. All that *exists* lies. To be in the truth means wanting Not-To-Be. God is Truth. Thus God is Union, God is Convergence." (*YEA* 90-91)[58]

A similar connection is made in *Le livre des questions:*

> *Before and after the word comes the sign*
>
> *and, in the sign, the void where we grow.*
>
> *Only the sign can be seen, being a wound.*
>
> *But the eyes lie.* [. . .]

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[57] "c'est à l'absence de Dieu majuscule que je me heurtais et non au concept de dieu. Peu à peu, cette absence est devenue l'ABSENCE, notre absence à nous-même, l'absence d'origine à la faveur de laquelle se fonde toute création. L'abîme en somme" (*DL* 106).

[58] "Je [Yaël] n'ai qu'un souci : vivre l'absence de Dieu. / Dieu S'exila, laissant à l'homme le soin de décacheter l'univers. Je serai tous les mensonges de Dieu pour mourir de Sa mort ; / car Dieu est mort de mentir. Tout ce qui *est* ment. Être dans la vérité, c'est aspirer au Non-être. Dieu est Vérité. Ainsi Dieu est conjonction, Dieu est convergence" (*Y* 125-26).

> Reb Jacob, who was my first teacher, believed in the virtue of the lie because, so he said, there is no writing without lie. And writing is the way of God. (*BQ* 85)[59]

The connections here are anything but definitive; the correlations slide between the lie, writing, God, and truth. Still, the act of creating these correspondences is already significant. If there is a connection between God and the writer through the act of creativity, for instance, then it follows that the author shares in the alterity that results in God's absence. Derrida comments on the subsequent absence of the writer, noting the necessity of leaving a certain liberty to language itself: "*Absence* of the writer too. For to write is to draw back. Not to retire into one's tent, in order to write, but to draw back from one's writing itself. To be grounded far from one's language, to emancipate it or lose one's hold on it, to let it make its way alone and unarmed. To leave speech" (*W&D* 70).[60] The word seems to occupy a space all its own, an idea which harmonizes with Jabès's own ways of engaging with language. Jabès often seems to observe words carefully and quietly until affinities make themselves known through shared letters or significations. Creation, then, doesn't seem to be entirely in the hands of the one who creates, but also inherent in the nature of the created or written object. Only by withdrawing can the writer harness the richness that is already present in the words themselves.

Creativity is in the nature of the Judeo-Christian God, as it is in the nature of the writer. A sense of inevitability is therefore present in the rationale of the writer and his work. The writer mourns through writing because writing is the necessary means of processing emotional events. "He writes. He writes for the sake of his hand, his pen, to appease his eyes. For if he did not

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[59] "*Avant et après la parole, il y a le signe, / et, dans le signe, le vide où nous croissons. / Ainsi, étant blessure, seul le signe est visible. / Mais l'œil ment. /* [. . .] Reb Jacob, qui fut mon premier maître, croyait à la vertu du mensonge parce que—disait-il—il n'y a pas d'écriture sans mensonge et que l'écriture est le chemin de Dieu" (*LQ* 96).

[60] "*Absence* de l'écrivain aussi. Ecrire, c'est se retirer. Non pas dans sa tente pour écrire, mais de son écriture même. S'échouer loin de son langage, l'émanciper ou le désemparer, le laisser cheminer seul et démuni. Laisser la parole" (*ED* 106).

write, what would become of them? [. . .] Only writing can keep the writer's eyes on the surface" (*BQ* 53-54).[61] Jabès gives the impression writing is a necessary act for the writer, not merely an act to communicate something to an intended reader. The writer cannot choose to do other than write. Yukel, described as both a writer and a witness, must write even if nothing can be changed by his writing, simply because it is a part of who he is. This idea, combined with the notion that words have certain innate characteristics, suggests an image of the writer as a sort of vessel that simply allows the words to be recorded: "Rhythm is internal. It is the rhythm of fate. No matter how you tried, you could neither go faster nor more slowly" (*BQ* 44).[62] This passivity is not quite right either, though. Rather, writing seems to be an act necessary to life, which the writer must not neglect. The writer works with words while still allowing them the space to shift. By using a variety of images and analogies that seem to contradict each other, Jabès allows the words he uses to remain mysterious and suggestive, while still being meaningful.

The Book: Blankness and Wound, Silence and Scream

While all of the contradictions that Jabès presents may seem impossible to circumscribe in any kind of definition or overarching theory, he suggests that there is one place that can contain them all: the book. Jabès depicts the book as being all-encompassing, containing the infinite within itself, much like Mallarmé's or Borges's concepts of the total Book.[63] Where

[61] "Il écrit. Il écrit pour sa main, sa plume, pour apaiser le regard; car, s'il n'écrivait pas, que deviendraient-ils? [. . .] Seule l'écriture maintient le regard de l'écrivain à la surface" (*LQ* 59).
[62] "Le rythme est intérieur; il est celui de la fatalité. Quoi que vous fassiez, vous ne pourriez aller plus vite ni plus doucement" (*LQ* 49).
[63] Though Waldrop suggests that Jabès explicitly distances himself from the apparent similarities with Borges's writing in *Lavish Absence* (133), the similarities nonetheless strike me significant. While Jabès may be resistant to the possibility of a physically infinite book, as Borges depicts in "The Library of Babel," the idea of a figuratively infinite book that expands through interpretation is present in Borges's stories as well; see "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "Death and the Compass." It seems to me that Jabès is closer to Borges than he readily indicates. The surface of the infinite book in "The Library of Babel" is, after all, not so unlike the Riemann surface that Maurice Blanchot uses to illustrate his essay on Jabès's work, "Interruptions."

Mallarmé's idea of the Book is one of totality and closure, however, Jabès's is open and unending. In *Questioning Edmond Jabès*, Motte lays out the clear differences between the two without denying their similarities: "[Jabès] suggests that Mallarmé's Book was necessarily closed, in that it synthesized all books, all readings, into one, allowing neither prolongation nor interpretation" (Motte 101). Instead of this closed version of the complete Book, Jabès focuses on a Book that continually opens to greater and greater degrees, encouraging unending interpretation, much like the Talmud. Motte also notes Blanchot's influence on Jabès in the idea of the Book as always in the process of becoming or always to come, as in Blanchot's title *Le livre à venir,* which also appears in Jabès's *Yaël* (Motte 102). The Book for Jabès thus incorporates a Messianic quality of expectation for what has not yet arrived.

The infinite nature of the Book allows it to become the site of all of the contradictions that Jabès explores. The book itself can be understood as a microcosm of the relationship between the tension of the blank page and that of the wound or mark. The silence before speech, and the blank page before the writer begins to work, is the canvas for the vocable (as Jabès so often refers to the word) that has not yet come into existence. Each book contains all of its own potential, even from before it is written, creating a paradox of origins. "'Where is the book set?' 'In the book'" (*BQ* 16-17).[64] No other response is possible. Even God's existence is understood as being contained by the book: "Si Dieu est, c'est parce qu'Il est dans le livre" (*LQ* 36). Jabès frequently references Moses's encounter with God as evidence of the primacy of the word in Jewish theology. While Moses was able to have a direct encounter with God, no other being has done the same. The result of the conversation was the presentation of the (written) Ten Commandments, subsequently broken, indicating not only that God must be approached through the word, but that that word consists of fragments. As Derrida interprets, "The breaking of the

[64] "—Où se situe le livre? —Dans le livre" (*LQ* 19).

Tables articulates, first of all, a rupture within God as the origin of history" (*W&D* 67).[65] The book and written words are also likened to the totality of Jewish existence, both individually and collectively: "So the country of the Jews is on the scale of their world, because it is a book. Every Jew lives within a personified word which allows him to enter into all written words" (*BQ* 100).[66] The emphasis on textual study of the Jewish holy texts, the mystery promised by the word in the tradition of Kabbalah, each of these emphasizes the importance of the text as a site of meaning originating with God's communication to his people through the tablets. Still, even words can evince absence, Jabès suggests. "All letters give form to absence," he asserts, again throwing off the reader's equilibrium by a counterintuitive association (*BQ* 47).[67] While such a statement seems counterintuitive, perhaps one way of understanding it is through writing's destructive potential. When Yukel sees the words "MORT AUX JUIFS" ("DEATH TO THE JEWS") written on the walls, everything else disappears for him—even though the words may be unnoticeable to other passersby.

Considering that Jabès's project for the book is so vast and enigmatic, it is fitting that the volumes of *Le livre des questions* are not marked with any indication of genre. In *Du désert au livre*, Jabès speaks of his impatience with the novel as a genre (and, more specifically, with the novelist): "What makes me uneasy is his pretense of making the *space* of the book the space of the story he tells—making the subject of his novel the subject of the book. / To me this feels like a sort of assassination" (*DB* 101).[68] The book, then, may tell a story, but it is not limited to the story it tells; it may contain characters, but the characters do not define it. The book is something

[65] "La rupture des Tables dit d'abord la rupture en Dieu comme origine de l'histoire" (*E&D* 103).
[66] "Ainsi le pays des Juifs est à la taille de leur univers, car il est un livre. Chaque Juif habite dans un mot personnalisé qui lui permet d'entrer dans tous les mots écrits" (*LQ* 113).
[67] "Toutes les lettres forment l'absence" (*LQ* 51).
[68] "Ce qui me gêne, c'est sa prétention à faire de *l'espace* du livre l'espace de l'histoire qu'il conte ; du sujet de son roman le sujet du livre. / J'ai l'impression qu'il y a là comme un assassinat" (*DL* 141).

altogether different from the novel, but Jabès does not say exactly what it is. Instead, the lack of definition is the essential component to understanding the genre of his work. In *Aely* the reader encounters a reflection on genre, or rather lack of genre:

> . . . this is why I dreamed of a work which would not enter into any category, fit any genre, but contain them all; a work hard to define, but defining itself precisely by this lack of definition; a work which would not answer to any name, but had donned them all; a work belonging to no party or persuasion [. . .] a book, finally, which would only surrender by fragments, each of them the beginning of another book. (*YEA* 247)[69]

Jabès emphasizes the importance of *not* naming the genre of the work. This is significant not only for the focus on ambiguity, but also because naming is of utmost significance for Jabès in other circumstances. He speaks of a child as beginning to exist not at birth, but at the moment of being named: "When are we really born? When do we leave the death from which we proceed? For the real death precedes life given that the other death at least leaves traces. Are we born at the instant when we let out our first cry? Or, more reasonably, at the moment when our parents choose a name for us?" (*DB* 5).[70] In other words, though the trauma of birth and the child's first cry are certainly a part of the beginning of life, the act of naming is even more fundamental. The refusal to name or categorize his book (or the Book) thus holds the book in a liminal space, between death and life, which perhaps enables its infinite potential.

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[69] ". . . c'est pourquoi j'ai rêvé d'une œuvre qui n'entrerait dans aucune catégorie, qui n'appartiendrait à aucun genre, mais qui les contiendrait tous; une œuvre que l'on aurait du mal à définir, mais qui se définirait précisément par cette absence de définition; une œuvre qui ne répondrait à aucun nom, mais qui les aurait endossé tous; une œuvre d'aucun bord, d'aucune rive [. . .] un livre enfin qui ne se livrerait que par fragments dont chacun serait le commencement d'un livre" (*A* 57).

[70] "Quand naissons-nous vraiment ? Quand quittons-nous la mort dont nous procédons ? Car la vraie mort précède la vie puisque l'autre laisse au moins des traces. Naissons-nous à l'instant où nous poussons notre premier cri ? Ou bien, plus raisonnablement, au moment où les parents choisissent pour nous un nom?" (*DL* 21).

The book is thus the site of many deep paradoxes, the most provocative of which may be that of silence and the scream. The space of expression seems to be situated between these opposite, yet similarly non-linguistic, reactions. The scream of Sarah functions as one unstoppable response to the horror of the Holocaust, while silence functions as an equally powerful force. Writing incorporates elements of both while not fully being either, which would seem to indicate that it occupies a space between the two of them. Jabès incorporates both silence and scream in a way that suggests that they do not oppose each other as merely different volume levels at opposite ends of the spectrum. Rather, they share a profound similarity due to the tendency of people to resort to one or the other in situations of extreme duress. Since both silence and the scream are nonlinguistic, writing cannot fully encompass either one; and yet by creating a space in which both scream and silence can be understood, it becomes something of a point of intersection between them. Such a point may be both infinite and infinitesimal. In *Lavish Absence*, Rosmarie Waldrop describes this space in temporal terms, as rhythm. Among other rhythms that structure the book, she notes:

> Perhaps there is a fourth rhythm, on the level of thought. The rhythm in which the book oscillates between the two frontiers of language:
>
> Lower limit scream.
>
> Upper limit silence. (Waldrop 74-75)

As Waldrop first introduces her reading of *Le livre des questions*, a work that she knows intimately both as reader and as translator, she uses a similar turn of phrase to present what could be considered the essence of the work: "A book about the word. Between scream and silence. The word through which we become human. Other. The word which is our mirror and our wound" (Waldrop 2). Indeed, the word is all of these things in Jabès's writing. While his medium

is the printed word, he nevertheless manages to incorporate both nonlinguistic sound and silence not only as elements among the words on the page, but also as ideas that the words suggest. Waldrop variously notes Jabès's propensity toward silence, and his movement away from it. She comments on Jabès's use of white space, for instance: "It is more than a matter of typography and layout. Space and the visual have invaded the very basis of the time-based art of language. [. . .] These blank spaces in Jabès remind us of our condition of separation, of solitude. / Whereas sound envelops" (Waldrop 8). She notes later that when publishing her English translations, it is always extremely difficult to convince the American publishers of the importance of all that white space. The gesture toward silence through this spatial tactic of white space, then, is of great significance. At the same time, though, Waldrop also notes that Jabès does not pare down his language as another mode of suggesting silence. Instead, he uses more and more words: "Edmond Jabès's road to silence is not minimalism. He is not paring his words down to a minimum, but circling, encircling. A deeper and deeper plunge of involution. He lays siege to silence" (Waldrop 102). Neither the scream nor silence takes precedence over the other; both are fundamental, and both permeate *Le livre des questions*.

The scream, first of all, is multiple in what it expresses. On one hand, it is literal and immediate—the instinctive reaction of one suffering a trauma. As such, it is one of the first things that Sarah mentions: "I scream. I scream, Yukel. We are the innocence of the scream" (*BQ* 15).[71] At the same time, though, the scream captures—in a way that is vocal but nonlinguistic—the full spectrum of emotions and reactions to the larger situation. Without saying a word, it is the entire truth: "It is the whole truth I wanted to express. And truth is a scream, a stubborn, ineradicable image which pulls us out of our torpor. An image which overwhelms or nauseates

[71] "Je crie. Je crie, Yukel. Nous sommes l'innocence du cri" (*LQ* 17).

us" (*BQ* 122).[72] The scream allows Jabès to convey an understanding of horror without resorting to description. Words indeed often seem futile, compared to the infinite and indistinguishable grains of sand in the desert: "'Pick up some sand,' wrote Reb Ivri, 'and let it glide between your fingers. Then you will know the vanity of words'" (*BQ* 113).[73] The visceral, embodied nature of a scream, then, forgoes the use of language, for "The world is illegible on the skin" (*BQ* 137).[74] It is at once immensely specific to the suffering one is undergoing at the moment of the scream, and also expansive, tapping into all pain that has been endured. The scream is therefore instant and ancient:

> I have given your name and Sarah's to this stubborn scream,
> to this scream wedded to its breath and older than any of us,
> to this everlasting scream
> older than the seed (*BQ* 33)[75]

Still, not even the scream can be understood in its fullness, even by the one who screams. Sarah's scream indicates her madness, but in her madness she cannot associate the scream with herself. She hears it as something external to her, even if on one level she recognizes herself in it: "'I do not hear the scream,' said Sarah. 'I am the scream'" (*BQ* 166).[76] The scream is an escape from language into the body and into pure emotion.

Silence, meanwhile, is similarly multiple in its connotations and functions. As with the scream, silence is an escape from language, though this time into the unknown rather than into the body. Silence similarly battles the futility of words, and even their violence: "To be the

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[72] "C'est toute la vérité que je voudrais exprimer et la vérité est un cri, une image entêtée, ineffaçable qui nous tire de notre torpeur, une image qui nous éblouit ou nous donne la nausée" (*LQ* 136).
[73] "Ramasse un peu de sable, écrivait Reb Ivri, puis laisse-le glisser entre tes doigts; tu connaîtras, alors, la vanité du verbe" (*LQ* 126).
[74] "Le monde est illisible sur la peau" (*LQ* 155).
[75] "J'ai donné ton nom et celui de Sarah à ce cri qui s'obstine, / 1a ce cri qui a épousé son souffle et qui est plus ancien que nous tous, / à ce cri de toujours, / plus ancien que la graine" (*LQ* 39).
[76] "Je n'entends pas le cri, dit Sarah. Je suis le cri" (*LQ* 187).

world, the seasons, of soothed, reconciled words. To be the silence in their repose and above their bloody battles. For often words are bows, and utterances arrows, bright or dark" (*BQ* 66).[77] And again, similarly emphasizing silence as dialogue that is apart from the violence of language: "*Words rush in and knock everything over. They want, each, to get their chance to convince. The true human dialogue, that of hands and eyes, is a silent dialogue*" (*BQ* 65).[78] Rather than something internal and specific to one person, such as the physical response of a scream, silence often functions as a sort of connective tissue between two people, or between two words. In the context of conversation, silence is potential before any words have been spoken, and reflection after the speaker has finished. Jabès's incorporation of silence is best understood in conjunction with the work of Maurice Blanchot in "Interruption (as on a Riemann surface)" in which silence or interruption functions as an essential tool for communication.

Reception of Jabès by Blanchot and Derrida

A strong affinity between the thought and writing of Jabès and Blanchot is undeniable; indeed, the two writers built off of one another's work in rich ways. Like that of Jabès, Blanchot's writing demonstrates a strong penchant for questioning, paradox, and the indefinable, as well as for blank space. Blanchot frequently casts his works in fragmented forms; even when the prose is more linear, its themes often emphasize the importance of discontinuity. For Blanchot, as for Jabès, the essential lies in the gesture of questioning: "There is a question and yet no doubt; there is a question, and nothing that can be said, but just this nothing, to say. This is a query, a probe

[77] "Être l'univers, les saisons des vocables bercés, réconciliés, être le silence dans le repos des vocables et au-dessus de leurs luttes sanglantes; car, souvent, les mots sont des arcs, les paroles des flèches, lumineux ou obscurs" (*LQ* 73).
[78] "*Les mots bousculent tout, veulent, à tour de rôle, convaincre. Le vrai dialogue humain, celui des mains, des prunelles est un dialogue silencieux*" (*LQ* 72).

that surpasses the very possibility of questions" (*WD* 9).[79] Similarly, the issue of readability or decipherability is crucial to each writer, as each recognizes the risk of something remaining undecipherable. Blanchot applies this to the idea of the self, and accompanies the thought with a reference to Jabès: "Would writing be to become, in the book, legible for everyone, and indecipherable for oneself? (Hasn't Jabès almost told us this?)" (*WD* 2).[80] For each, writing is an attempt to decipher that which ultimately has no definite encoded message. The risk is that even the end result may be illegibility.

Beyond the gesture of questioning, Blanchot and Jabès share a similar tendency to welcome interruption into their work. Both speak of interruption as a sort of breathing of the text. For Blanchot, the clearest exposition of the need for discontinuity in discourse is in his essay "Interruption: As on a Riemann Surface," which comes as a response to *Le livre des questions*. There he speaks of the need for breaks between letters and words for legibility's sake, and also between dialogue partners in the give-and-take of conversation. He calls it "the respiration of discourse" (*IC* 76).[81] Repeatedly in "Interruption," Blanchot emphasizes the necessity of rupture, of pause, of turn-taking in dialogue in order for communication to occur. Words can be understood by the spaces between them, thoughts by the gap between their end and the response of the interlocutor. This idea is first posited in a simple manner, with an image that cannot be refuted: "when two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn" (*IC* 75).[82] Blanchot proposes that not only is interruption present; it is fundamentally necessary to language and comprehension: "the fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to another in order

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[79] "Il y a question, et cependant nul doute; il y a question, mais nul désir de réponse; il y a question, et rien qui puisse être dit, mais seulement à dire. Questionnement, mise en cause qui dépasse toute possibilité de question" (*ED* 21).
[80] "Écrire, serait-ce, dans le livre, devenir lisible pour chacun, et, pour soi-même, indéchiffrable? (Jabès ne nous l'a-t-il pas presque dit?)" (*ED* 8).
[81] Susan Hanson's translation of *EI*, here and throughout. "La respiration du discours" (*EI* 108).
[82] "quand deux hommes parlent ensemble, ils ne parlent pas ensemble, mais tour à tour" (*EI* 106).

to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of interval" (*IC* 75).[83] Phrased in another way, "interruption permits the exchange. Interrupting for the sake of understanding, understanding in order to speak" (*IC* 76).[84] It is clear that for Blanchot, interruption is not only an inevitable part of communication, but indeed that which permits communication to occur.

Jabès similarly talks about needing the white spaces on the page in order to let the prose breathe. In an interview with Paul Auster, he discusses the physicality of the writing process, noting that his suffering with asthma created in his prose a need for air.

> I do believe that a writer works with his body. You live with your body, and the book is above all the book of your body. In my case, the aphorism—what you might call the naked phrase—comes from a need to surround the words with whiteness in order to let them breathe. As you know, I suffer from asthma, and sometimes breathing is very difficult for me. By giving breath to my words, I often have the feeling that I am helping myself breathe. (Auster 15)

Jabès's prose is rhythmic and measured, not unlike breathing, and the white space on the page naturally slows and calms the reading pace. It encourages a reflective reading process, allowing the reader to savor each line on its own as well as in its textual context.

For both Blanchot and Jabès, though, the need for interruption is more profound than simple white space or silence. It also represents the fundamental impossibility of complete knowing, and stands in for the irrevocable otherness that cannot be understood. Blanchot talks about this difference as being between people; for Jabès, the ultimate Other is the figure of God. Beyond the mere alterity of another individual, God is doubly Other for Jabès. For one thing, the separation between human nature and divine nature is one that never can be understood or

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[83] "le fait que la parole a besoin de passer de l'un à l'autre . . . montre la nécessité de l'intervalle" (*EI* 106).
[84] "l'interruption permet l'échange. S'interrompre pour s'entendre, s'entendre pour parler" (*EI* 107).

bridged; this sense of the infinite difference between God and humanity is one shared by any number of religions or believers. Jabès multiplies the complexity of this difference, though, by his depiction of God as absent. Not only can human nature and divine nature never be reconciled, but now the Divine is no longer present, meaning that the alterity is not even between two beings, but between being and absence. Jabès incorporates a number of images to hint at the incommensurable alterity between God and humanity, such as the desert, silence, and blankness. By incorporating both thematic and structural elements, Jabès creates a multifaceted approach to something that, by nature, cannot be understood. Blanchot discusses this break between beings as "another kind of interruption, more enigmatic and more grave" (*IC* 76);[85] rather than a pause contributing to coherence, this is rather a rupture which marks vast, insurmountable distance. "It introduces the wait that measures the distance between two interlocutors—no longer a reducible, but an irreducible distance" (*IC* 76).[86] Deeper than between words, this interruption is between beings, and marks their insurmountable alterity. The distance is indeed more than vast; it is infinite, and yet it also seems to act as the foundation of relationship, for only through this separation can communication take place. To this effect, Blanchot expounds on this interruption not only of words, but of being itself:

> What is now in play, and demands relation, is everything that separates me from the other, that is to say the other insofar as I am infinitely separated from him—a separation, fissure, or interval that leaves him infinitely outside me, but also requires that I found my relation with him upon this very interruption that is an *interruption of being*. This alterity, it must be repeated, makes him neither another self for me, nor another existence, neither a modality or a moment of universal

[85] "une autre sorte d'interruption, plus énigmatique et plus grave" (*EI* 108).
[86] "Elle introduit l'attente qui mesure la distance entre deux interlocuteurs, non plus la distance réductible, mais l'irréductible" (*EI* 108).

> existence, nor a superexistence, a god or a non-god, but rather the unknown in its infinite distance. (*IC* 77)[87]

Infinite alterity, then, is at the base of every dialogue, and it is to this infinite space that textual interruption must reply in order to be coherent, in order to be continuous. "Now it is to this hiatus—to the strangeness, to the infinity between us—that the interruption in language itself responds, the interruption that introduces waiting" (*IC* 77).[88] The structural interruption in conversation is thus a manifestation of the infinite difference between individuals, albeit on a smaller scale.

As a model for continuous interruption, Blanchot borrows the concept of a "Riemann surface" as indicated in the essay's title. It is described in a endnote as "an ideal note-pad made up of as many pages as necessary [. . .]. Upon this leaved surface numbers are inscribed, some of which occupy the same place upon different sheets. (*IC* 441, endnote 1).[89] It is thoroughly singular and plural, unified and interrupted. Things can be simultaneously written, spoken, prepared, all at the same conversational point but located on different sheets of the surface. Blanchot's proposals incorporate such structural complexity, denying interruption as simple silence and emphasizing instead a formal or structural change: "the arrest here is not necessarily or simply marked by silence, by a blank or a gap (this would be too crude), but by a change in the form or the structure of language" (*IC* 77).[90] Similarly, he denies that the spoken word is

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[87] "Ce qui est en jeu et demande rapport, c'est tout ce qui me sépare de l'autre, c'est-à-dire dans la mesure où je suis infiniment séparé de lui, séparation, fissure, intervalle qui le laisse infiniment en dehors de moi, mais aussi prétend fonder mon rapport avec lui sur cette interruption même, qui est une *interruption d'être*—altérité par laquelle il n'est pour moi ni un autre moi, ni une autre existence, ni une modalité ou un moment de l'existence universelle, ni une surexistence, dieu ou non-dieu, mais l'inconnu dans son infinie distance" (*EI* 109).

[88] "C'est à ce hiatus—l'étrangeté, infinité entre nous—que répond, dans le langage même, l'interruption qui introduit l'attente" (*EI* 109).

[89] "un bloc-notes idéal comprenant autant de feuillets qu'il est nécessaire . . . Sur cette surface feuilletée, ils inscrivent des nombres dont plusieurs occupent la même place sur différents feuillets" (*EI* 109, footnote).

[90] "l'arrêt ici n'est pas nécessairement ni simplement représenté par du silence, un blanc ou un vide (combien ce serait grossier), mais par un changement dans la forme ou la structure du langage" (*EI* 109).

simply a bridge to cross this infinite chasm: "to speak (to write) is *to cease thinking solely with a view to unity*, and to make the relations of words an essentially dissymmetrical field governed by discontinuity [. . .] to allow intermittence itself to speak: a speech that, non-unifying, is no longer content with being a passage or a bridge—a non-pontificating speech" (*IC* 78).[91] Of course, since language and interruption seem essential one to the other, expecting language to conquer rupture is not only impossible, but also undesirable, for the rupture is necessary.

Like Blanchot, Derrida also mentions absence as a sort of breath within the text: "Absence, finally as the breath of the letter, for the letter *lives*. [. . .] Signifying absence or separation, the letter lives as aphorism" (*W&D* 72).[92] Derrida focuses on the ideas of wound and rupture that Jabès works with. In particular, he highlights the breaking of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments as a fundamental rupture between the people and God: "The breaking of the Tables articulates, first of all, a rupture within God as the origin of history" (*W&D* 67).[93] Similarly, he notes that not only do the broken tablets form the foundation of the Jewish people's communication with God, but they also create a basis for poetry: "Poetic autonomy, comparable to none other, presupposes broken Tables. [. . .] Between the fragments of the broken Tables the poem grows and the right to speech takes root" (*W&D* 67).[94] He also highlights the aporia intrinsic in Jabès's project: "Absence attempts to produce itself in the book and is lost in being pronounced; it knows itself as disappearing and lost, and to this extent it remains inaccessible and impenetrable. To gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is to

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[91] "parler, c'est cesser de penser seulement en vue de l'unité et faire des relations de paroles un champ essentiellement dissymétrique que régit la discontinuité [. . .] donner la parole à l'intermittence, parole non unifiante, acceptant de n'être plus un passage ou un pont, parole non pontifiante" (*EI* 110).

[92] "Absence enfin comme souffle de la lettre, car la lettre *vit*. [. . .] Signifiant l'absence et la séparation, la lettre vit comme aphorisme" (*E&D* 108).

[93] "La rupture des Tables dit d'abord la rupture en Dieu comme origine de l'histoire" (*E&D* 103).

[94] "L'autonomie poétique, à nulle autre semblable, suppose les Tables brisée… Entre les morceaux de la Table brisée pousse le poème et s'enracine le droit de la parole" (*E&D* 102).

lie" (*W&D* 69).[95] The difficulty Derrida focuses on here is that of preserving the nature of silence while breaking it with speech or written text. It is because of this paradox, Derrida suggests, that Jabès's septology is able to be simultaneously a reflection on absence and on the book: "If absence is the heart of the question, if separation can emerge only in the rupture of God—with God—if the infinite distance of the Other is *respected* only within the sands of a book in which wandering and mirages are always possible, then *Le livre des questions* is simultaneously the interminable song of absence and a book on the book" (*W&D* 69).[96] The fragment (and the absence necessarily implied by the fragment) is thus both intrinsic to the style and the thematic of *Le livre des questions*: "There is an essential *lapse* between significations. [. . .] To allege that one reduces this lapse through narration, philosophical discourse, or the order of reasons or deduction, is to misconstrue language, to misconstrue that language is the *rupture* with totality itself. The fragment is neither a determined style nor a failure, but the form of that which is written" (*W&D* 71).[97] Thus the breaking of the tablets, which created both the fragmented texts and the empty space between them, prefigures the nature of textual interpretation and meaningful discourse that Jabès works with in his writing.

Another connection that Derrida draws between the writer and the Jew (as suggested in Jabès's writing) is that of otherness and displacement. Both find their home in writing: "The Poet and the Jew are not born *here* but *elsewhere*. They wander, separated from their true birth. Autochthons only of speech and writing, of law, '*Race born of the book*' because sons of the

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[95] "L'absence tente de se produire elle-même dans le livre et se perd en se disant; elle se sait perdante et perdue, et dans cette mesure elle reste inentamable et inaccessible. Y accéder, c'est la manquer; la montrer, c'est la dissimuler; l'avouer, c'est mentir" (*E&D* 105).

[96] "Si l'absence est l'âme de la question, si la séparation ne peut survenir que dans la rupture de Dieu—avec Dieu—, si la distance infinie de l'Autre n'est *respectée* que dans les sables d'un livre où l'errance et le mirage sont toujours possibles, alors *Le livre des questions* est à la fois le chant interminable de l'absence et un livre sur le livre" (*E&D* 104-5).

[97] "Il y a un *lapsus* essentiel entre les significations. [. . .] Prétendre le réduire par le récit, le discours philosophique, l'ordre des raisons ou la déduction, c'est méconnaître le langage, et qu'il est la rupture *même* de la totalité. Le fragment n'est pas un style ou un échec déterminés, c'est la forme de l'écrit" (*E&D* 107-08).

Land to come" (*W&D* 66).[98] In *Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès* (1997), Gary D. Mole focuses on this issue of displacement and foreignness in depth. As he notes, "In Jabès's work, however, it is writing that leads to a meditation on Judaism, and it is in the book that both Jew and writer are *étrangers*" (Mole 54). The priority, then, is on the writer and on writing. As Mole also notes, "the radical alterity of Jabès's Jew is produced through the word, whether specifically Jewish or not" (Mole 65). Jabès's understanding of writing informs his depiction of Jewishness, leading him to focus on the role of the word for both, and tracing the sense of displacement to language. The sense of difference and otherness for both the Jew and the writer may create an uncomfortable sense of marginality, but it also assures the perpetuity of the act of questioning: "The original opening of interpretation essentially signifies that there will always be rabbis and poets. And two interpretations of interpretation. The Law then becomes Question and the right to speech coincides with the duty to interrogate. The book of man is a book of question" (*W&D* 67).[99] Derrida binds the nature of the word itself with the act of questioning, so that each word and each attempt to interpret engenders new openings for questions and further interpretations. Not only is the book infinite in this view, it seems, but the word as well.

In concluding *Writing and Difference* with "Ellipsis," which also engages with Jabès's text, Derrida continues his reflection on the perpetual possibilities of the word in interesting ways. First, the image of the ellipsis implies something that has been removed, as though the only way that a book could be concluded was by eliminating the other possibilities that it opens. By focusing his reference on *Le retour au livre*, he suggests a cyclical redoubling of the book back on itself, moving again towards origins and opening new possibilities of interpretation.

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[98] "Le Poète et le Juif ne sont pas nés *ici* mais *là-bas*. Ils errent, séparés de leur vraie naissance. Autochtones seulement de la parole et de l'écriture. De la Loi. '*Race issue du livre*' parce que fils de la Terre à venir" (*E&D* 102).
[99] "L'ouverture originaire de l'interprétation signifie essentiellement qu'il y aura toujours des rabbins et des poètes. Et deux interprétations de l'interprétation. La Loi devient alors Question et le droit à la parole se confond avec le devoir d'interroger. Le livre de l'homme est un livre de question" (*E&D* 102-03).

Because the return can never be perfect, because something always changes, the cycle is one of growth rather than mere repetition. Hence the geometrical figure of the ellipsis:

> Thus understood, the return of the book is of an *elliptical* essence. Something invisible is missing in the grammar of this repetition. As the lack is invisible and undeterminable, as it completely redoubles and consecrates the book, once more passing through each point along its circuit, nothing has budged. And yet all meaning is altered by this lack. Repeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has exactly the same center, *the origin has played*. (*W&D* 296).[100]

Derrida later refers to a passage in which Jabès works with the idea of the center, as the location of God—but also of the threshold, the margin, mourning, and God's absence. The suggestion or desire for the center seems unavoidable, and yet it is constantly couched in imperfect repetition, and thus constantly decentered. The paradox of a marginalized center works well within the myriad contradictions of Jabès's writing, and encourages reflection on the nature of the assumptions made about the implications of such words.

The complex reflections of Blanchot and Derrida on Jabès's writing are excellent examples of the way in which the book is (or can be) infinite. The essays written in the attempt to understand the work of Jabès create new opportunities for reflection, for the ideas in each of these theorists' work are certainly no less rich than those present in the work that inspired them. That both writers focused on the component of discontinuity in *Le livre des questions* is also an

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[100] "Ainsi entendu, le retour au livre est d'essence *elliptique*. Quelque chose d'invisible manque dans la grammaire de cette répétition. Comme ce manque est invisible et indéterminable, comme il redouble et consacre parfaitement le livre, repasse par tous les points de son circuit, rien n'a bougé. Et pourtant le sens est altéré par ce manque. Répétée, la même ligne n'est plus tout à fait la même, la boucle n'a plus tout à fait le même centre, *l'origine a joué*" (*E&D* 431).

interesting move, as not only the words create the possibility of critique, but the spaces between the words as well. Such observation is a fitting way of understanding ideas present in Jabès's writing regarding the interactions between the blank page and the word.

Conclusion

By allowing space for the unsayable in form and in theme, Jabès encourages the reader to engage in her own interpretations without suggesting any single way of approaching the text. The notion of trauma as a wellspring of the word and as an identifier of the Jew suggests that the text is both an effort to process trauma, and also a certain appreciation and acceptance for that which created the possibility for the text. Just as trauma functions both as something that results in suffering and as something that inspires text, rupture within the text itself also functions both to fragment the reading process and to make it richer. By working from a starting point of fragmentation, unspeakability, and irreconcilable contradictions, Jabès encourages the reader to engage with the text in a thoughtful, measured way and to allow expectations to shift perpetually. Silence and expression are not opposites in Jabès, but parts of a whole, each contributing to the possibility and impossibility of understanding. The silence between textual fragments, or the silence of the vast desert, stands in necessary counterpoint to the irrepressible scream of Sarah, and both together create a sense of just how deep and incomprehensible is the trauma of Sarah and Yukel, and that of the millions of others whose stories remain untold.

IV. Immense Tragedies, Intimate Scale: Jacques Roubaud

While trauma for Jabès is sweeping, pervasive, and mysterious, Jacques Roubaud turns away from images of vastness in favor of engaging with the tragic on a much more intimate and personal level. *Quelque chose noir*[101] (1986) is a haunting work of poetry, the focus of which is Roubaud's mourning for his deceased wife, who died in 1983 at the age of 31. Though published alone, the collection is best understood in conjunction with the journals of his wife, Alix Cléo Roubaud (*Journal*, 1984), as Roubaud's poems frequently respond directly to entries found there. *Quelque chose noir* reacts to both the visual and verbal content of Alix Cléo's engagement with the world around her: the title of Roubaud's collection refers to a series of photographic self-portraits of Alix Cléo ("Si quelque chose noir"), and his words echo hers as he comes to terms with her untimely death.

Though the original publication of *Quelque chose noir* does not include any reproductions of Alix Cléo's photographs, understanding them provides a useful foundation to begin exploring Roubaud's gesture. The thematically and visually dark self-portraits depict Alix Cléo's body standing or lying in a mostly dark room, illuminated by a shaft of sunlight through a single window. In some of the images, the sunlight focuses with unusual intensity on her upper chest while the rest of her body is in shadow, seemingly isolating the site of her pain. In other images, multiple exposures show her ghostly figure simultaneously in various positions throughout the room (lying down, for instance, while another image of her crouches and observes her own body, as though holding a wake for her own death). The uncanny effect of these multiple exposures gives the impression that she imagines herself both as someone experiencing certain things, while also observing herself in the midst of those experiences. Her

[101] *Some Thing Black,* trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. I will use Waldrop's translation throughout.

journals, like her photographs, show an intense self-awareness and desire for self-examination as she navigates through the last four years of her life. Alix Cléo meditated extensively on death, both in her photographs and in her writing; having endured long years of illness as well as substance abuse, she seemed to have had a prescient sense of an early end. She reflected on dark things, and on the possibility of dark events coming to pass; Roubaud's poems confront not the vague potential of future dark events, but on the actuality of a black void of loss. In *Quelque chose noir*, what Alix Cléo imagined and alternately hoped for and dreaded has come to pass; it is no longer in the realm of "if" as in her title, but the certainty of his.

Roubaud's writing suggests silence and the unspeakable in a variety of ways, all of which create the impression that while the poetry is an important method of coming to terms with his wife's death, it is nevertheless impossible to incorporate the totality of his emotions in words alone. Because of the fundamental tension between expression and its impossibility, *Quelque chose noir* frequently tends toward aporia and contradiction. In this chapter, I will examine Roubaud's poetic techniques and the various tensions in his work in order to demonstrate the interconnectedness of mourning, writing, and the unspeakable.

Silence is explicitly present from the very first line as a sort of adversary that must be faced, allowing the reader to immediately sense the new, devastating silence of the narrator's life, as well the inadequacy of language in coping with such a loss. The first poem begins not only by including silence as a thematic element, but also as a typographical technique, visually breaking up the line with blank intervals: "There before this silence inarticulate" (*SB* 9).[102] From these first words, the mourning process in Roubaud's haunting work is poignantly laid bare. Though the title of the work addresses blackness (the English translation is published as *Some Thing Black*), whiteness is also a foundational element, as white space on the page and an implicit

[102] "Je me trouvai devant ce silence inarticulé" (*QN* 11).

silence stand in stark contrast to the black ink. The collection of poems does not focus on mourning alone, however; just as Jabès associates trauma with both Jewish identity and the act of writing, so Roubaud also links mourning and loss with language and writing. Interspersed with poetic reflections on his loss are many meta-poetic verses considering the act of writing, poetic form, and language, which invite the reader to consider commonalities between the productive processes of mourning and writing.

Formal Elements of Mourning and Renewal

Roubaud is characteristically attentive to form in this collection, both in terms of the forms with which he creatively constructs his own poetic framework, as well as the reflections on form that the poetry contains. The work consists of nine sections, each with nine poems of nine lines or segments. Other formal elements of each individual poem vary widely: some consist of sentences of prose with a certain degree of narrative, while others are composed of brief lines, sometimes no more than words or aphorisms. Following these sections is nothing—literally, a final poem entitled "*Rien*." Roubaud explicitly recognizes the structure within the poem itself, emphasizing the use of series of nine while noting at the same time his attempt to write in such a way as to integrate both reflections on his relation to his wife and the nothingness following the loss: "I'd rather slog away at circumscribing *nothing-you* precisely, impossible bi-pole that it is, at running through, around, this, these new sentences that I call poems" (*SB* 82).[103] Nothingness and the loss of Alix Cléo surround the product of his mourning, which takes shape in the collected poems. This line also highlights the element of contradiction that occurs frequently in the pages of the collection: the notion of "nothing-you" implies both absence and

[103] "Je m'acharne à circonscrire *rien-toi* avec exactitude, ce bipôle impossible, à parcourir autour, de ceci, ces phrases de neuf que je nomme poèmes" (*QN* 85).

fullness, both loss and memory. Neither alone sufficiently expresses what he needs to communicate, and though the two states seem contradictory, it is within this contradictory tension that Roubaud seems to be living.

Based on this fundamental contradiction, then, it is not surprising that while death is at the forefront of the work, life and rebirth also permeate it in form and content. Most notably, Roubaud implies the possibility of renewal by the very structure of the poems. By repeatedly incorporating the number nine into the poetic cycles, Roubaud draws the reader's attention to that number (*neuf* in French), and by extension, to its homonym meaning "new". He adheres rigorously to this structural element, despite the fact that other formal components vary widely. By doing so, Roubaud suggests that while emotions and reactions to trauma change over time, the process of coming to terms with loss and arriving at some form of renewal persists as a constant undercurrent to every word he writes in the collection. The mourning process is indeed about starting anew, forging a new life out of the shards of what has been destroyed. Sigmund Freud describes mourning as a productive process, one that enables the mourner to work through grief and come to a healthy equilibrium and a sort of new state of normalcy. As Freud asserts in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (154). This possibility of moving on is indeed a primary distinguishing factor between mourning and melancholia, the latter depleting rather than restoring the ego of the one suffering (Freud 163). Renewal, then, would appear to be a desirable and healthy end product of mourning, and the fact that Roubaud is able to create these poems after a long period of silence is indicative of such a restoration. At the same time, though, fresh beginnings are uncertain and even painful. Early on, Roubaud addresses the new as a question, linked to his wife's photographic gaze and to himself:

> This image: you never answered about your angles
>
> which afterward are you fixing now? Where you
>
> frame me alone.
>
> Me? something entirely new? (*SB* 55)[104]

Here the idea of newness is present, but remains a question. On the other hand, the constant newness of suffering is more definite for Roubaud, who dwells on the always-fresh image of the lifeless hand of his wife. "This image again for the thousandth time with the / same violence" (*SB* 8).[105] The shock and pain do not diminish with time in this instance; rather, they are perpetually refreshed each time the image recurs, creating a sort of perpetual present that loops Roubaud in the moment of most intense suffering. In *L'entretien infini*, Blanchot similarly recognizes the tendency of suffering to create a perpetual present for the one who endures the pain:

> Suffering is suffering when can no longer stand it, and when, because of this non-power, one cannot cease suffering it. A singular situation. Time is as though arrested, merged with the interval. There, the present is without end, separated from every other present by an inexhaustible and empty infinite, the very infinite of suffering, and thus dispossessed of any future: a present without end and yet impossible as a present. The present of suffering is the abyss of the present. (*IC* 44)[106]

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[104] "Cette image: tu n'as jamais répondu sur ton regard / quel après fixes-tu? où tu me places seul. / Moi? quelque chose d'entièrement neuf?" (*QN* 57).
[105] "Cette image se présente pour la millième fois à neuf / avec la même violence" (*QN* 11).
[106] "La souffrance est souffrance, lorsqu'on ne peut plus la souffrir et, à cause de cela, en ce non-pouvoir, on ne peut cesser de la souffrir. Situation singulière. Le temps est comme à l'arrêt, confondu avec son intervalle. Le présent y est sans fin, séparé de tout autre présent par un infini inépuisable et vide, l'infini même de la souffrance, et ainsi destitué de tout avenir : présent sans fin et cependant impossible comme présent; le présent de la souffrance est l'abîme du présent" (*EI* 63).

Time does not function in a linear way for Roubaud as he recollects the image of Alix Cléo's hand, and as Blanchot suggests, the way time seems to fold back on itself is natural to one who suffers. The notion of a perpetual present—or at least an irregularity in the movement of time and memory—is also inherent in photography. A photograph captures a particular moment in time that has been removed from its original temporal sequence. Perhaps the similarity between these two temporal processes (of suffering and of photographs) is part of the reason for Roubaud's emphasis on visual memory, which I will explore in depth in a moment.

Beyond the suggestion of newness permeating the language and structure of the poems through the use of "*neuf*," Roubaud also makes other suggestive homophonic associations involving numbers. One such occurrence pairs "*trois*" and "*toi*" (translated as "three" and "thee"), resulting in an interesting notion of multiplicity within identity:

> Three times thee three of your irreducibly separate
> realities ousted lost in a scatter held together only
> by this pronoun: thee (*SB* 59)[107]

The connection between the two is emphasized by the repetition of the words in close proximity to one another. In fact, the clarity of the juxtaposition also subtly affirms the connection between the two meanings of "*neuf*." Roubaud intertwines identity and numbers in this phrase by his use of *trois* and *toi*; it makes sense, then, that through the word *neuf* part of the mourning process itself would also be similarly bound to numbers. The image also suggests a multiplicity intrinsic to identity. Alix Cléo reinforces the notion of fragmentation within the self in her photographs, in which multiple ghostly images of her body appear simultaneously within a single frame. While I will soon discuss her photographs in detail, the element I would like to highlight here is the idea

[107] "Ce sont trois fois toi trois des irréductiblement / séparés déplacés réels de toi perdus en une diaspora / qu'unit seule ce pronom : toi" (*QN* 61).

of multiplicity within the self, which is pertinent to Roubaud's use of the informal second-person pronoun in conjunction with the number three.

A question underlying both Roubaud's formal choices and his reflections on poetics is why, in a work so profoundly and intimately focused on his wife, he would also choose to highlight the nature of language and form. Roubaud connects the two by hinting at another sort of loss, one more directly linked to writing itself: that of loss of language through aphasia, in which he sees a similarity to the evolution of poetic form: "I've held the same about verse. in the course of its destruction, rules of versification drop one by one in, likewise, aphasic order. as though the poets dismantled their house floor by floor. not blowing it up all at once" (*SB* 128).[108] I will return later to the question of aphasia, and focus first on the formal implications of this statement. While many elements of Roubaud's poetry are flexible in formal terms—there is no fixed meter or rhyme scheme for the majority of the poems, for instance—, his use of fixed numbers of verses, poems, and sections suggests nostalgia for a more rigorous poetic formalism. This nostalgia may be a way of mourning the changes and processing them to create a unique literary form. Such nostalgia strikes a similar chord as his refusal to change his habits after his wife's death; by retaining something of that which has passed, he can begin to face what is yet to come.

The layout of the poems is another formal element that has thematic importance. Roubaud's use of white space, in particular, is an effective means of allowing the mourning process itself to take root in the printed text. The tone of the writing seems quiet, and silence is constantly present; similarly, Roubaud places a good deal of blank space on the page. Not only is

[108] "J'ai pensé la même chose du vers. les règles du vers disparaissent une à une dans sa destruction, selon un ordre, aussi, aphasique. Comme si les poètes défaisaient leur bâtiment étage par étage. Sans le faire exploser d'un coup" (*QN* 131).

there white space between lines and poems, but also tabs within lines, which create a sort of punctuation designated by blankness. Roubaud comments on the poetic form and the white space it includes, recognizing that it suggests a readerly expectation of dialogue:

> Even on the page: answer implicit in line, spacing, format
>
> Something is going to arise out of the silence, the
>
> Punctuation, the blank space going to surface for me (*SB* 122)[109]

Here the silence appears as a backdrop against which a dialogic response will (or at least could) emerge. The idea of dialogue is subtly reinforced by stylistic elements that Roubaud borrows from Alix Cléo's journals, indicating a call-and-response between the two works. As Véronique Montémont notes in her rigorous analysis, *Jacques Roubaud: L'amour du nombre*, the influence of Alix Cléo's journals on Roubaud's writing is particularly noticeable in the punctuation. "Moreover, Roubaud mimics the punctuation of Alix, who uses numerous periods within the sentence. The transposition of this habit into the poems at once troubles the eye and marks the text with the seal of the deceased spouse" (Montémont 59, my translation throughout).[110] The use of punctuation similar to that of his spouse fragments the text while also linking it to emotional source of his writing, and the white spaces also allow a quietness that awaits a reply from the beloved. Sadly, though, the silence remains only that— "This poem is addressed to you and will encounter nothing" (*SB* 122).[111] Roubaud's writing responds to that of Alix Cléo, but she cannot continue the movement of the conversation.

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[109] "Même dans la page : la réponse supposée par la ligne, / les déplacements, les formats / Quelque chose va sortir du silence, de la ponctuation, / du blanc remonter jusqu'à moi" (*QN* 124).

[110] "En outre, Roubaud calque la ponctuation d'Alix, qui utilise nombre de points à l'intérieur de la phrase. La transposition de cette habitude dans les poèmes à la fois déconcerte l'œil et marque le texte du sceau de l'épouse défunte."

[111] "Ce poème t'est adressé et ne rencontrera rien" (125).

The blank interval between the two partners in conversation is necessary and, as Blanchot argues in "L'interruption," infinite; in this case the separation between them is temporally infinite as well as figuratively so. Blanchot insists that silence is not to be feared in conversation, and that "discontinuity assures the continuity of understanding" (*IC* 76);[112] but while the break between Alix Cléo's last words and images does contribute to the richness of Roubaud's response, the conversation seems to have come to an end point. His response, rather than helping the dialogue to progress, makes even more noticeable "the wait that measures the distance between two interlocutors—no longer a reducible, but an irreducible distance" (*IC* 76).[113] While Blanchot posits that this unbridgeable separation exists between any two interlocutors, it becomes even more sharply apparent in the case of *Quelque chose noir*. Still, Roubaud's words do not seem to be kind of hypothetical negative interruption that "far from still being a speech that recovers its wind and breathes, undertakes—if this is possible—to asphyxiate speech and destroy it as though forever" (*IC* 78).[114] Roubaud's words leave the possibility and the desire for response open, despite its impossibility. His response to his wife may be primarily for the process of mourning, but as Blanchot recognizes, "if pain (fatigue or affliction) hollows out an infinite gap between beings, this gap is perhaps what would be most important to bring to expression" (*IC* 78).[115] The poem is indeed a dialogue with the lost loved one, with the blank spaces being the infinite possibility of her absent responses.

White space is necessary to poetry, of course, as it delineates one verse from the next and visually indicates a structure that differs from prose. Montémont notes that it likewise defines a

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[112] "la discontinuité assure la continuité de l'entente" (*EI* 107).
[113] "l'attente qui mesure la distance entre deux interlocuteurs, non plus la distance réductible, mais l'irréductible" (*EI* 108).
[114] "loin d'être encore la parole qui reprend souffle et respire, prétend—si c'est possible—l'asphyxier et la détruire comme à jamais" (*EI* 111).
[115] "si la douleur (ou la fatigue et le malheur) creuse entre les êtres un vide infini, ce vide est peut-être ce qu'il importerait le plus" (*EI* 111).

geometric space, separating words from each other and containing the text with a particular position on the page (71-72). In Roubaud's case, however, the white space is not only constructive, contributing to the formation of the verse, but also destructive, interrupting the verse where it normally would be continuous. It is both substance and emptiness; it is noticeable for its nothingness, and yet it is not merely a void. In the film *L'atelier d'écriture de Jacques Roubaud*, Pascale Bouhénic describes the relationship between black and white in the text as both negating each other and negating the difference between them:

> Just like the black in question, it is a black that is closer to the idea of black than black is, it is blackness itself. In the same manner this white is whiteness itself and it is essentially the result of a double negation to the degree that black opposes white, and this particular white, it is the thing that opposes black, but it is not the same black we started with. (cited in Montémont 75)[116]

Both the black and the white call attention not only to themselves, but to each other, constantly bringing the reader's awareness to their opposition. The blackness of the title and the dark tones of the themes of the work are made even darker by the juxtaposition of stark whiteness against them. Montémont describes the process as one that combines composition and explosion: "This very particular selection, underscored by the omnipresence of white, is one of the distinctive marks of Jacques Roubaud's poetry and gives it a large part of its originality, since spatial organization, which governs semantics and syntax, at the same time remodels the body of a poem, which it makes into a block that is at once exploded and recomposed" (Montémont 73).[117]

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[116] "Aussi bien que le noir dont il est question, c'est un noir qui est plus près de l'idée de noir que le noir, c'est le noir même. De la même manière ce blanc c'est le blanc même et c'est au fond le résultat d'une double négation dans la mesure où le noir s'oppose au blanc, et ce blanc-là, c'est ce qui s'oppose au noir, mais ce n'est pas le noir dont on était parti."

[117] "Ce découpage très particulier, souligné par l'omniprésence du blanc, est l'une des marques distinctives de la poésie de Jacques Roubaud et lui donne une grande partie de son originalité, puisque l'organisation spatiale, qui

The black and white depend on one another, and Roubaud exploits their difference in a number of ways: black text set against noticeable white space; somber themes and an emphasis on light; and especially through the black and white of photographic negatives and prints. Roubaud directly notes the affinity between text and image, silence and white space:

> Ink and image in solidarity, allies
>
> Like oblivion and record (*SB* 45)[118]

The various uses of white and black will help establish a means of understanding the relationship between mourning the loss of the loved one—which I relate to black—and the white void of the beloved's absence.

Photographic Representation of Mourning

Black and white find one of their clearest applications in the incorporation of photography into Roubaud's text. Though no photographs or illustrations are included in *Quelque chose noir* (at least in the original French publication; a selection of Alix Cléo's photographs does appear in the English translation), they are a constant and significant presence, particularly when the work is considered in conjunction with Alix Cléo's *Journal*. Photographs are a central component of Roubaud's remembrance of his wife, as she was a photographer and her work was still present in their home following her death. Roubaud uses discussion of images to create a sense of engagement with the text:

> Would let show: white space between the pieces.
>
> Would be silent as much as she could, lacking solidity, grisaille.
>
> To be silent in photos: aphorisms. [. . .]

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gouverne le sémantisme et la syntaxe, remodèle en même temps le corps d'un poème, dont elle fait un bloc éclaté et recomposé tout à la fois."

[118] "L'encre et l'image se retrouvent solidaires et alliées / Comme l'oubli et la trace" (*QN* 47).

Memory infinitely tortu ous. (*SB* 68)[119]
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These lines suggest that visual elements allow for silence in multiple ways: first, they occupy a defined space, which allows for the empty spaces between them to figure into the discussion; second, they create the possibility of silence because of their ability to speak without the use of language. At times Roubaud contemplates the photos as an entrance to his memory of his spouse, reflecting on them as indications of her relation with the world. Indeed, the above passage closely echoes her own reflections: "What will you do with me,my grisaille,my lack of solidity,my desire to be silent as much as possible,in photos for example.Or why photos?because they are fragmented and,like in aphorisms,fragmentation lets the white space between the pieces show;" "the ruses of memory ,the infinitely tortuous" (*Journal* 67, 87; my translation throughout).[120] Still, while photographic imagery can serve as a connection to his wife's life, it also functions as a mechanism for remembering her death. Even beyond actual photographs, visual memories and impressions haunt Roubaud, particularly as he recalls the image of her hand after her death, frozen in time. The visual nature of this memory calls to mind the precision and permanence of a photograph, rather than the fluidity of memory of a particular moment in time.

Another important photographic reference is Alix Cléo's series of self-portraits, "Si quelque chose noir" ("If Something Black"). The predominantly dark photographs with their multiple exposures imply a meditation on death, as noted earlier. This impression becomes more complicated in the last of the photographs, however, in which her husband's body also forms part of the tableau. Her body lies on top of his, and as Jean-Jacques Poucel suggests, "he is pictured

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[119] "Laisserait voir : les blancs entre les morceaux. / Se tairait le plus possible, manquant de consistance, grisaille. / Se taire par la photo : aphorismes. [. . .] / Mémoire infiniment tortu euse" (*QN* 70).
r

[120] "Que vas-tu faire de moi,ma grisaille,mon manque de consistance,mon désire de me taire le plus possible,par la photo par exemple.Ou pourquoi la photo?parce qu'elle est fragmentée et que,comme dans les aphorismes,la fragmentation laisse voir les blancs entre les morceaux;" "les ruses de la mémoire ,l'infiniment tortueuse."

as a resting bed for Alix Cléo's body, as if his living form were a sepulcher or a tomb for his wife's being" (Poucel 177). She clearly characterized him as one who provided support for her; and yet, from his writing, it is apparent that she also sustained him. The photographs may appear bleak or macabre, but an element of hope and comfort persists, largely because of this last image.

Neither her visual works nor his written poems are a uniform shade of darkness. Just as her high-contrast black and white photographs offset dark tones with bright, overexposed streaks of white light on the page, so the darkness of the themes in *Quelque chose noir* is contrasted by stark whiteness. The whiteness is not necessarily hopefulness, though at times it seems to be so; rather, it is frequently indicative of absence or silence. Indeed, Roubaud paradoxically finds comfort not in the white spaces, but in the black ones ("When I wake up it's dark: still. / Hundreds of dark mornings have been my refuge" [*SB* 31]).[121] Black is the color of ink on the page, and therefore of work, expression, and productivity, which partially explains Roubaud's draw toward black rather than white. Darkness also provides concealment and comfort, whereas light exposes (just as in a photography darkroom). Perhaps Roubaud's desire to remain in the shadows indicates an unreadiness to move towards healing. Still, by writing the poems that he does, he necessarily exposes and brings things to light. There is a fundamental aporia at work in Roubaud's writing: he seeks to avoid healing, remain in the shadows, and guard his silence, and yet he explains as much through writing, which indicates a readiness to process and expose emotions and experiences. The aporetic tension here suggests an affinity between expression and silence, as both are necessary but difficult. The tension may be thought of as being akin to the process of developing a photograph from film, which creates a reversal between spaces of light and shadow. The black/white distinction is visually present in Roubaud's writing as well, as the poems seem at times to shrink into the whiteness of the page, taking up very little space;

[121] "Quand je me réveille il fait noir : toujours. / Dans les centaines de matins noirs je me suis réfugié" (*QN* 33).

likewise, a sort of white silence is apparent in the minimalistic language that Roubaud uses. The poem is spare, never flowery, and suggests much beyond what it says. Poucel frames *Quelque chose noir* in terms of its relation to elegy: "the spare language of *Quelque chose noir* presents a work of grieving that resolutely resists conventional elegiac rhetoric and casts memorialization in a minimized and exacting poetic discourse" (174). I will explore this silence of minimalism in more depth below; for the moment, I will focus on the interaction between the visual and the verbal.

Since his work hinged on verbal expression while hers focused on visual expression, it is natural that Roubaud would spend time reflecting on the nature of these two types of engagement with the world. Part of his conclusion regards the immediacy or distance of each form of engagement to the world or experience. Roubaud describes images as standing closer than language does to tangible reality. He asserts that "Saying is homesick for showing," implying that visual cues are truer or more immediate than linguistic ones, and that speaking longs to be able to show rather than say (*SB* 63).[122] This desire to speak with the immediacy of image is part of the complexity of the unsayable as it is inherent in language: each spoken or written phrase endeavors to convey some reality that it can never fully encapsulate in words. In *La chambre claire* (1980), Roland Barthes similarly addresses the sense of immediacy and authenticity of photographic images as compared to text:

> No writing can give me this certainty. It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself. [. . .] Language is, by nature, fictional; the attempt to render language unfictional requires an enormous apparatus of measurements: we convoke logic, or, lacking

[122] "Dire est la nostalgie de montrer" (*QN* 65).

> that, sworn oath; but the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself. (*CL* 87)[123]

Still, despite this seeming certitude, Roubaud also understands images as creating a distance, particularly in the photographer's distance from her subject. He attributes just such a detachment to his wife's way of approaching the world around her:

> She had loved life passionately, from a distance. without feeling in or part of it. unhappy, she took pictures of quiet lawns and family bliss. in paradisal ecstasy, pictures of death and its nostalgia. (*SB* 13)[124]

Alix Cléo had likewise noted this tendency within herself: "Told you that I had loved life from a distance passionately but without the impression of being there or being part of it" (*Journal* 14).[125] Visual expression, then, is not a guarantee of immediacy; on the contrary, a photograph may give an impression of greater immediacy than a text, but the camera creates a boundary between the photographer and the world around her, making it impossible for her to fully be part of the scene that she captures. It is also worth noting that a photograph may function as an account of something that has happened, as in photojournalism or family snapshots, or it may serve as a work of artistic expression. As a work of art rather than a catalogue of events, the photograph takes on an added element of distance; while the photographer is still witnessing the event firsthand, what she intends to communicate to the viewer is different from the scene that she herself experiences.

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[123] "Cette certitude, aucun écrit ne peut me la donner. C'est le malheur (mais aussi peut-être la volupté) du langage, de ne pouvoir s'authentifier lui-même. [. . .] Le langage est, par nature, fictionnel ; pour essayer de rendre le langage infictionnel, il faut un énorme dispositif de mesures : on convoque la logique, ou, à défaut, le serment ; mais la Photographie, elle, est indifférente à tout relais : elle n'invente pas ; elle est l'authentification même" (*CC* 134-5).
[124] "Elle avait aimé la vie passionnément de loin. sans l'impression d'y être ni d'en faire partie. malheureuse, elle photographiait des pelouses tranquilles et du bonheur familial. extase paradisiaque, elle photographiait la mort et sa nostalgie" (*QN* 15).
[125] "Te disais que j'avais aimé la vie de loin passionnément mais sans l'impression d'y être ni d'en faire partie."

Going back to Roubaud's earlier statement that speech is nostalgia for the visual, then the distance that Roubaud notes between image and reality suggests an even greater separation between the writer and the real. Distance does not imply falsehood, though. Roubaud manages to find truth in death by imbuing it with speech, although he undermines the association between death and expression a few lines later by denying both the power of language and the possibility of death's ability to speak. The tension that is evident in this particular poem is a crucial one involving the nature of language in experience. He begins the poem, titled "Mort," with the assertion "Your death speaks true" (*SB* 64).[126] Roubaud then goes on to insist that death's truth resides in the fact that it has spoken, not simply because it is death:

> Your death speaks true. your death will always speak true.
> what your death speaks is true because it speaks. some have
> held that death speaks true because it is true. others, that
> death could not speak true because truth has no truck with
> death. but in reality, death speaks true the moment it speaks. (*SB* 64)[127]

Here, truth and speech are united; but within the same poem, Roubaud emphasizes death's ability to show and inability to speak: "Your death, you admitted, means nothing? it shows. what? that it means nothing" (*SB* 64).[128] And later, simply: "language has no power" (*SB* 65).[129] Language is thus in a paradoxical position: it is Roubaud's chosen means of expression in which he finds truth and meaning, and yet it lacks the impression of immediacy found in the image. As Blanchot puts it, visual expression is dependent on language, even if that language is silence: "without

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[126] "Ta mort parle vrai" (*QN* 66).
[127] "Ta mort parle vrai. ta mort parlera toujours vrai. ce que parle ta mort est vrai parcequ'elle parle. certains ont pensé que la mort parlait vrai parceque la mort est vraie. d'autres que la mort ne pouvait parler vrai parceque le vrai n'a pas affaire avec la mort. mais en réalité ta mort parle vrai dès qu'elle parle" (*QN* 66).
[128] "Ta mort, de ton propre aveu, ne dit rien? elle montre. quoi? qu'elle ne ne dit rien" (*QN* 66).
[129] "le langage n'a pas de pouvoir" (*QN* 67).

language, nothing can be shown. And to be silent is still to speak. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it" (*WD* 11).[130] Roubaud's inclusion of visual images seems to express something beyond that which can be communicated through words alone, and yet the reader's understanding of those images occurs through language's presence or absence (especially in the case of this collection, where we do not even see the images, but only Roubaud's verbal depiction of them). Still, by incorporating the idea of images into his written work, Roubaud suggests the importance of various means of perception through which reality must pass in order to be meaningful. Neither language nor image is sufficient alone; the two interact to create an understanding of truth.

Images become Roubaud's way of interpreting his memories of Alix Cléo. He looks back at photographs from her final year and finds them to be comforting, even though they must now be interpreted differently, through the lens of her death (then impending, now actual).

> In retrospect, that year seems almost paradise to him: her
> last photographs as if suddenly free of anxiety [. . .]
> He can interpret these as foreknowledge, as so many good-
> byes. It does not make the pictures heavy. (*SB* 54)[131]

The way Alix Cléo photographed herself also affects the way Roubaud thinks back on her memory. Many of the images in her "Si quelque chose noir" series feature multiple exposures of herself in a variety of positions (as her journal similarly expresses a sense of her own multiplicity); some of Roubaud's lines reflect a sense of the multiple within her identity. There is a definite sense of fragmentation when he writes (as also noted above), "Three times thee

[130] "sans langage, rien ne se montre. Et se taire, c'est encore parler. Le silence est impossible. C'est pourquoi nous le désirons" (*ED* 23).
[131] "Vue d'après, cette année-là lui semble presque paradisiaque: les dernières photographies, comme allégées de l'angoisse, brusquement [. . .] / Il peut interpréter cela comme une prescience, des adieux. Les images ne s'en trouvent pas alourdies" (*QN* 56).

three of your irreducibly separate / realities ousted lost in a scatter held together only / by this pronoun: thee" (*SB* 59).[132] All of the separation and displacement is still unified by the pronoun that points to her. And yet, even though he thinks back on Alix Cléo through the medium of her photographs, Roubaud is aware that her existence is not to be found there: "You were not black and white flat. were you? / You were not cut into a 5x7 in this world" (*SB* 55).[133] Still, though, he needs the images:

> And why a picture? [. . .]
>
> Why *this* picture?
>
> The world is filled with homeless, colorless things [. . .]
>
> Surrounded by pictures of you, selected by your eye.
>
> selected and illumined by your thinking. thinking in silver's
>
> black. scattered among pictures of you. [. . .]
>
> You said: "the singular is stupid." (*SB* 76-77)[134]

The images of her or chosen by her gaze may seem unnecessary, but they are elements of the way she engaged with the world and the way she understood herself. The many fragments that they provide—both of space and of time—help to establish a constellation of ideas and components that indeed make her who she is.

Photography is further significant as a silent form of communication and in its union of black and white—characteristics it shares with printed text. The internal photography of x-rays provided a visible manifestation of impending death as absence: "Looking at the X-ray, you

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[132] "Ce sont trois fois toi trois des irréductiblement / séparés déplacés réels de toi perdus en une diaspora / qu'unit seule ce pronom: toi" (*QN* 61).

[133] "Tu n'étais pas blanche et noire plate. l'étais-tu? / Tu n'étais pas découpée en rectangle dans le monde" (*QN* 57).

[134] "Et pourquoi faut-il une image? [. . .] / Pourquoi faut-il *cette* image? / Le monde s'est peuplé d'objets incolores [. . .] / Entouré d'images de toi, choisies par ton regard. choisies / et par ta pensée éclairées. pensée de l'argent du noir. / dispersé en images de toi [. . .] / Tu disais: 'le singulier est idiot'" (*QN* 78-79).

could clearly see the absence, new, of one lung: a relative lack of dark on the screen. Just a black arc toward the top" (*SB* 53).[135] Despite its nothingness, the missing lung, in its terrible significance, is all that the unnamed patient (not his wife, in this case) and the visiting Roubaud can see. Photographic reminders of absence are also prominent after Alix Cléo's death, as her missing presence is all Roubaud can focus on when he sees the photographs on the wall:

> but above all there is what's
>
> missing now,
>
> You. for in this picture, your eyes which look at me
>
> here, on this chair where I'm sitting in order to see you, your
>
> eyes
>
> Already see the moment when you'll be absent, foresee it,
>
> and that's why I have been unable to budge from this place. (*SB* 90)[136]

Her photographs had previously been a sort of conversation between her as photographer, him as viewer, and the various subjects, but her absence skews that possibility for communication and causes him to see only her absence. Similarly, the photographs, like Roubaud's poems, allow for the visualization of silence as white space and an emphasis on the fragmentary, as noted earlier in terms of punctuation and structure: "Would let show: white space between the pieces. [. . .] / To be silent in photos: aphorisms" (*SB* 68).[137] Image and text are juxtaposed here as photo and aphorism, both of which are fragments, for photography's action "fragments all movement" (*SB* 97).[138] These fragments are necessary in order to give voice to the lack he now experiences and

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[135] "En regardant la radio, on voyait très bien l'absence, nouvelle, d'un poumon : par comparaison, un manque d'ombre sur le cliché. Seul un arc noir, vers le haut" (*QN* 55).
[136] "mais surtout il y a, / ce qui maintenant manque / Toi. parceque tes yeux dans l'image, qui me regardent, / en ce point, cette chaise, où je me place, pour te voir, tes / yeux, / Voient déjà, le moment, où tu serais absente, le prévoient, et c'est pourquoi, je n'ai pas pu bouger de ce lieu-là" (*QN* 92).
[137] "Laisserait voir ; les blancs entre les morceaux. [. . .] / Se taire par la photo : aphorismes" (*QN* 70).
[138] "fragmente chaque mouvement" (*QN* 99).

which he displays through silence, white space, or photography's stoppage of time. In her journals, Alix Cléo likewise reflects on the fragmentary nature of photography, as well as on its relation to time. "The photographable is as infinitely fragmentable(into these brilliant fragments that are photos)as this time that we have in the world" (*Journal* 41).[139] For her, the visible world can be broken into infinite fragments, which are not only visual but also temporal. Photography becomes a means of isolation and of possession.

The capacity of photography to freeze time is likewise significant in that the captured image blends a past moment, a present gaze, and the implication of future durability. Time ceases to be linear, forming instead a vertiginous simultaneity. For Roubaud, time revolves around his loss. "Don't tell me: 'her death is both the instant before and the instant after you look: you can never see it" (*SB* 20).[140] Interestingly, this passage is a direct echo of Alix Cléo's own words, this time understanding photography as a link to death: "The doubling of things is not a mysterious depth:it is both the instant before and the instant after the photo,that cannot be seen;it is therefore the image of our death" (*Journal* 13).[141] It is perhaps the impossible nature of the simultaneity of disparate moments that links the photograph to death. Indeed, in *La chambre claire*, Barthes finds that a photograph always carries an implication of death precisely because of its ability to unite an image as moment, memory, and future object. Because each photograph has the potential to outlive its subject, the paper image always has the potential of being looked at long after the subject has died. Barthes describes looking at the photograph of someone condemned to die, and notes that both the statements "he is dead" and "he is going to die" are

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[139] "Le photographiable est aussi infiniment fragmentable(en ces fragments brillants que sont les photos)que ce temps que nous avons au monde."
[140] "On ne peut pas me dire : 'sa mort est à la fois l'instant qui précède et celui qui succède à ton regard. tu ne le verras jamais'" (*QN* 22).
[141] "La doublure des choses n'est pas une profondeur mystérieuse:elle est à la fois l'instant qui précède ou qui succède à la photo,qu'on ne voit pas;elle est donc l'image de notre mort."

equally true. "*He is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. [. . .] Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (*CL* 96).[142] The unusual behavior of time in the photograph and its viewer is reminiscent of Blanchot's reflections on the same subject at the beginning of *L'écriture du désastre*: "When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it in the order of lived time, belongs to the disaster, the disaster has always already withdrawn or dissuade dit; there is no future for the disaster, just as there is no time or space for its accomplishment" (*WD* 1-2).[143] Such moments seem to take place outside of time; they cannot simply be thought of as one moment in a chain of other moments, because of the drastic changes that they provoke. Incorporating photography into his poetry is a way for Roubaud to depict the trauma as being outside of time, perpetually past, present, and future.

Barthes's discussion of photography in *La chambre claire* provides an interesting way of understanding some of the ways that Roubaud engages with his wife's photographs in *Quelque chose noir*. For instance, the original publication of Roubaud's work contains no photographs from his wife's series of the same name, nor does Roubaud directly mention their absence, leaving the reader only with his reflections on them. Barthes similarly reflects on a photograph of intense personal value for him, taken of his mother as a child. Though Barthes includes reproductions of quite a number of the photographs that he discusses in the text, he does not include the cherished photograph of his mother. Unlike Roubaud, though, Barthes comments explicitly on the omission: "I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for

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[142] "*Il va mourir.* Je lis en même temps : *cela sera* et *cela a été* ; j'observe avec horreur un futur antérieur dont la mort est l'enjeu. [. . .] Que le sujet en soit déjà mort ou non, toute photographie est cette catastrophe" (*CC* 150).
[143] "Quand le désastre survient, il ne vient pas. Le désastre est son imminence, mais puisque le futur, tel que nous le concevons dans l'ordre du temps vécu, appartient au désastre, le désastre l'a toujours déjà retiré ou dissuadé, il n'y a pas d'avenir pour le désastre, comme il n'y a pas de temps ni d'espace où il s'accomplisse" (*ED* 7-8).

me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture [. . .]; at most it would interest your *stadium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound" (*CL* 73).[144] (*Studium*, for Barthes, is the general draw of a photograph; he contrasts it to *punctum*, the most engaging detail for the viewer.) Barthes's connection between the photograph and the wound is significant here. He attributes the value of the photograph to the wound that it provokes in himself, and refuses to show it to those who cannot share the same wound. Perhaps Roubaud avoided including images from Alix Cléo because the wound would not be shared. Barthes also comments on the work of mourning as he contemplates the beloved photograph, but notes that it doesn't have the magic function of erasing pain sometimes ascribed to it: "It is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless" (*CL* 75).[145] Roubaud's first lines exude a similar feeling of stagnance in mourning: "some in moments like this thought they could decipher some residue of spirit it was a consolation for them or a double horror not for me" (*SB* 9).[146] Though Roubaud's text clearly engages in the work of mourning, he is hesitant to see in it anything more than the mundane and painful daily actions that it consists of. Barthes finds that in this banality lies the true horror of death: "As if the horror of Death were not precisely its platitude! The horror is this: nothing to say

[144] "Je ne puis montrer la Photo du Jardin d'Hiver. Elle n'existe que pour moi. Pour vous, elle ne serait rien d'autre qu'une photo indifférente [. . .]; tout au plus intéresserait-elle votre *studium* : époque, vêtements, photogénie ; mais en elle pour vous, aucune blessure" (*CC* 115).
[145] "On dit que le deuil, par son travail progressif, efface lentement la douleur ; je ne pouvais, je ne puis le croire ; car, pour moi, le Temps élimine l'émotion de la perte (je ne pleure pas), c'est tout. Pour le reste, tout est resté immobile" (*CC* 118).
[146] "certains en de semblables moments ont pensé déchiffrer l'esprit dans quelque rémanence cela fut pour eux une consolation ou du redoublement de l'horreur pas moi" (*QN* 11).

about the death of one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph, which I contemplate without ever being able to get to the heart of it, to transform it" (*CL* 92-93).[147]

The photographs also act as a unifying force for the blackness of death and the whiteness of absence, for the two cannot be separated in a photographic image. Colors are faded in *Quelque chose noir*, leaving little besides tones of black, white, and grey. While the terms "*noir*" and, to a lesser extent, "*blanc*" and "*gris*" appear with some frequency, other colors are very rarely invoked (as noted in great precision by Montémont, 86). Indeed, Roubaud comments on the absence of color, noting that memories seem to fade into black and white photographs:

> Always, in memory, the colors get lost. here you are light or
>
> dark. it's all my language can muster.
>
> Inside, you hedge me with photos.
>
> Your colors escape me one by one. like your words. (*SB*124)[148]

Black and white, then, constitute the main visual palette of the text. The somber world of Roubaud appears drained of vibrant colors, as though he moved through a crepuscular world in which the eye is unable to distinguish colors from one another. While there are occasional inclusions of color, they are rare. One example, in which black and nothingness still figure prominently: "The ski is blue or soon will be;" "And the jet black of early youth / and adulthood's blue turquoise / And the yellow abalone of nothingness which may not be / mentioned or thought" (*SB* 45).[149] Neither black nor white is wholly positive or negative; for example, while Roubaud takes refuge in darkness, the color black also suggests pain and

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[147] "Comme si l'horreur de la Mort n'était pas précisément sa platitude! L'horreur, c'est ceci : rien à dire de la mort de qui j'aime le plus, rien à dire de sa photo, que je contemple sans jamais pouvoir l'approfondir, la transformer" (*CC* 145).

[148] "Dans tout souvenir se perdent les couleurs. là tu es claire / ou sombre, c'est tout ce dont mon langage peut jouer. / Intérieurement tu me confines à tes photographies. / Tes couleurs m'échappent l'une par l'autre. comme tes phrases" (*QN* 127).

[149] "Le ciel est bleu ou le sera bientôt"; "Et le jais noir de la toute-jeunesse / et la turquoise bleue de l'être-adulte / Et l'abalone jaune du néant qui ne se conçoit ni ne se dit" (*QN* 47).

mourning. Rather, black seems to be figured as the site of organic life and death; it is connected to the black arc of the lung x-ray of Roubaud's friend, but also the dark intimacy of his wife's body: "What was hirsute in your nakedness was not the pitch-black hair around the moisture where my tongue would drain you" (*SB* 62).[150] Similarly, in one instance, he considers a self-portrait of his wife: "I looked at you. the dark. the black. the black pitched round the quick point. of your belly" (*SB* 41).[151] Alix Cléo's photographs of herself seem to collect darkness and light in very deliberate ways: her body is frequently in shadow, while points of light call attention to the darkness by their overexposure. These moments of blackness are moments of intense intimacy, implying a certain duality of mourning, in which both grief and tenderness are present.

Black finds its opposite both in the color white and in brightness, as of sunshine or other light. Like the color black, white likewise exhibits a spectrum of connotations; Roubaud flees from the light, but whiteness (especially as found in white space) seems clearly necessary to his work and to his mourning process. Whiteness and empty space seem indicative more of absence than of intimate loss: "Gone from the inside, the kiss, empty truth. / Gone" (*SB* 66).[152] Though the color white is not explicitly mentioned, absence and emptiness perhaps stand in for the color (or, more precisely, absence of color) as that which Roubaud cannot face: a sort of terror of the blank page or creative sterility, just as he cannot face the light of morning. Similarly associating whiteness and emptiness, in the chapter called "Meditative Portrait, V," Roubaud delves directly into the words from Alix Cléo's journal ("What is it that dies, when one dies?" [*SB* 69; also in *Journal* 105]).[153] At the end of his reflection, he concludes with a final line in

[150] "Ce qu'il y avait d'hirsute dans ta nudité n'était pas ta chevelure basse très noire autour de l'humide où la langue passait en t'écoulant" (*QN* 64).
[151] "Je te regardais. le sombre. le noir. le noir rangé sur le point vivant. de ton ventre" (*QN* 43).
[152] "Disparue de l'intérieur, du baiser, vérité vide. / Disparue" (*QN* 68).
[153] "Qu'est-ce qui meurt, quand on meurt?" (*QN* 71).

parentheses: "(all the rest was and remained blank)" (*SB* 69).[154] Waldrop translates "blanc" here as "blank," but it could be accurately translated as "white" as well. All color washes to white, as Roubaud engages with the written memories of his wife. At the same time, though, Roubaud figures whiteness as being exemplary of rebirth or new beginning, as in "Resurrection's white shell" (*SB* 45).[155] The black and white of the photograph also suggests that black ink on a white page has a similar capacity of suggesting mourning, intimacy, and absence, and that speech and silence must be joined in order to grasp both the trauma of death and the new life with absence. It has the possibility of both alleviating suffering and provoking it:

> Which ink was it guess if you can
>
> That gray brought me up black swallowed me down
>
> That trapped me in those eyes and dealt me to the dark. (*SB* 96)[156]

Both forces, as visualized in blackness and whiteness, constantly pull at Roubaud: "Between the months of silence when I went dumbly on my way. / And the near future when I'll shut up again, utterly baffled by these poems. / For any of these black lines being pushed across the paper to its end, its turn, may turn out, any moment, versed in a second silence. / And that between these narrow limits I must try to stretch and tell of you, again" (*SB* 83).[157] His writing is utterly necessary to his mourning, but his attempts to write can only lead to one possibility: silence.

Silence within Expression

[154] "(tout le reste fut et resta blanc)" (*QN* 71).
[155] "la coquille blanche de le Résurrection" (*QN* 47).
[156] "Devine, si tu peux, quelle encre était-ce là / Qui grise me vomit et noire m'avala / Qui me prit dans ces yeux me conférant à l'ombre" (*QN* 98).
[157] "Entre les mois de silence où je ne me prolongeais que muet. / Et le futur proche où je me tairai de ces poèmes avec absolue incompréhension. / Car pousser la moindre de ces lignes noires sur le papier jusqu'à son bout, son retour, veut dire que d'un instant à l'autre je vais me mettre à verser dans un second silence. / Et qu'entre ces limites étroites je dois essayer de me tendre et te dire, encore" (*QN* 86).

Roubaud indeed immerses himself in silence, allowing the text to slowly emerge from the absence of words that filled thirty months of mourning. He eventually finds that simply naming his wife allows him to protect her memory even after the loss of her body: "Saying your name I would give you an unassailable stability" (*SB* 84).[158] He also hints at the permanence of language, even if it does not have the tangible weightiness of reality: "Your name's an irreducible trace. There is no possible negation of your name" (*SB* 85).[159] Still, the possibility of immortalizing her memory in language was not immediate. Roubaud notes thtat for a long time, he suffered an incapacity to speak or write: "How can I write, married to a dead (wo)man" (*SB* 61)[160]—a phrase that echoes Alix Cléo's earlier sentiment indicating that she lamented, "how can I write, married to a poet" (*Journal* 126).[161] Roubaud repeats this impossibility later on as well:

> Faced with your death I remained stone silent.
>
> I could not speak for nearly thirty months.
>
> I could no longer speak in my way of speaking, I mean
>
> poetry. (*SB* 128)[162]

Poetry, then, is Roubaud's means of overcoming of silence, even though his poetry incorporates that silence into itself through its tone and its use of white space. Alix Cléo also refers to her own means of expression as silent elements: "Photography is indeed a form of silence.But still a diary can show its silences,as an imcomplete image its incompleteness" (*Journal* 90). Paradoxically, it was another traumatic event, unnamed in the text but presumably referring to his brother's suicide, that sparked Roubaud's ability to speak through poetry in the first place, making death a

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[158] "En te nommant je voudrais te donner une stabilité hors de toute atteinte" (*QN* 87).
[159] "Ton nom est trace irréductible. Il n'y a pas de négation possible de ton nom" (*QN* 88).
[160] "Impossible d'écrire, marié(e) à une morte" (*QN* 63).
[161] "impossibilité d'écrire, mariée à un poète."
[162] "Devant ta mort je suis resté entièrement silencieux. / Je n'ai pas pu parler pendant presque trente mois. / Je ne pouvais plus parler selon ma manière de dire qui / est la poésie" (*QN* 131).

catalyst both for speech and for silence (*QN* 131-2). Silence is a slippery character in what the reader can know of Roubaud's emotional and authorial processes: it both comforts and antagonizes; it is overcome by death and takes its grip via death; it is the antithesis of writing and is present simultaneously within writing.

Even when Roubaud does not focus on silence or the impossibility of expression, his language has a deeply quiet, minimalistic feel, as though the words are just barely able to disturb the sea of silence that surrounds him. Part of the quiet feel is achieved through the abundant use of white space, both surrounding the poetry and internal to each poem. The breaks within the lines create a sense of hesitancy, as though the words were difficult to find and even more difficult to pronounce. Roubaud's choices of language and syntax also contribute to the quiet feel of the book. By describing dark, silent mornings where he arranges everything in advance so as to make as little noise as possible; by focusing on colorless scenes; by the lack of conversation or any sense of interpersonal contact, Roubaud conveys the impression of the silence that engulfs his life at this point. Similarly, Poucel writes about Roubaud's avoidance of elegiac language: "the spare language of *Quelque chose noir* presents a work of grieving that resolutely resists conventional elegiac rhetoric and casts memorialization in a minimized and exacting poetic discourse" (Poucel 174). Roubaud's mourning process is idiosyncratic and quiet; there is no sense of words overflowing in an abundance of emotion, but rather a restraint that withholds all but the bare minimum of expression.

Partly by employing minimalistic and understated language in a work of intense emotion, *Quelque chose noir* feels reticent even in its expression. Indeed, the poignancy of the words is matched and underscored by the profound sense of silence against which they are set. Rather than compete against one another, language and silence contribute equally to the power of the

poetry. Roubaud glides along the borderline between expression and silence, allowing the two to coexist in a harmony comparable to that of black and white in a photograph. Silence functions both as a precursor to writing and as a presence within it; it is something that is not writing and yet is necessary to it. Because of this paradoxical tendency that both limits language and contributes to its power, a consideration of Blanchot's similar reflections on the subject will prove a useful foundation. Silence figures heavily into the aporetic turning points of Blanchot's *L'écriture du désastre*, suggesting both absence (or limitation of speech) and also the infinite component of language. Blanchot identifies this limit both as an inevitable component of writing, and also as the site of disaster. Silence holds within it the infinite possibility of expression: "I should like to limit myself to a single word, kept pure and alive in its absence, if it weren't that through that one word, I have all the infinite of all languages to bear" (*WD* 122).[163] Perhaps because of the infinite potential latent in silence (much like the potential for relationship that exists in separation), silence is actually the desired effect of writing: "To keep still, *preserving* silence: that is what, all unknowing, we all want to do, writing" (*WD* 122).[164] Writing cannot achieve the same degree of potentiality that silence can, and so a writer must constantly strive to approach the same sort of potential through words themselves, which are inherently limited and limiting. He describes writing as being a combination of two inarticulate things: grumbling and silence: "Neither reading, nor writing, nor speaking: this is not muteness, but perhaps a murmur utterly unheard of: thunder and silence" (*WD* 99).[165] The element of the inarticulate is constantly present in verbal expression as the more primal underpinnings of what one has to say. Much like the visceral scream of Sarah in Jabès's work, words are always trying but failing to communicate

[163] "Je voudrais me contenter d'une seule parole, maintenue pure et vive dans son absence, si, par elle, je n'avais à porter tout l'infini de tous langages" (*ED* 187).
[164] "*Garder* le silence, c'est ce que à notre insu nous voulons tous, écrivant" (*ED* 187).
[165] "Ni lire, ni écrire, ni parler, ce n'est pas le mutisme, c'est peut-être le murmure inouï : grondement et silence" (*ED* 154-5).

that which can perhaps best be said in inarticulate ways. As Blanchot notes, "Silence is perhaps a word, a paradoxical word, the silence of the word *silence,* yet surely we feel that it is linked to the cry, which breaks with all utterances" (*WD* 51).[166] Words can only exist against the background of silence that came before them and will come after them. Roubaud depicts an extreme version of this in his own story as he recounts his personal silence, sparked by death, that he could only overcome with language after the passage of time. Even once he has moved through his silence, the silence still haunts the text.

While Roubaud certainly expresses loss in his poetry, he also makes it clear that certain things are simply impossible to articulate. This can clearly be seen in the assertions that he makes in the poem entitled "Meditation on the Indistinct, on Heresy." He delineates three basic principles:

> There are three suppositions. the first, it's not amiss to number them: *there is no more*. I shall not name it.
>
> A second supposition is that *nothing can be said*.
>
> Another supposition, finally: *from now on nothing will be like her*. this supposition undoes all ties. (*SB* 73)[167]

Even in his words, then, Roubaud emphasizes that words are deficient for his purpose. He can only employ them if that inadequacy is understood as a founding premise. His spouse cannot be named here; nothing can truly be said; and nothing can ever be set in comparison to her. These suppositions declare the complete otherness of Alix Cléo's death in Roubaud's mind and subvert

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[166] "Le silence est peut-être un mot, un mot paradoxal, le mutisme du mot (conformément au jeu de l'étymologie), mais nous sentons bien qu'il passe par le cri, le cri sans voix, qui tranche sur toute parole" (*ED* 86).

[167] "Méditation de l'indistinction, de l'hérésie." / "Il y a trois suppositions. la première, ce n'est pas trop / d'y mettre un ordre, c'est qu'*il n'y a plus*. je ne la nommerai pas. / Une deuxième supposition, c'est que *rien ne saurait se dire*. / Une autre supposition enfin, c'est que *rien désormais ne* / *lui est semblable.* cette supposition destitue tout ce qui fait lien" (*QN* 75).

any possibility of attempting to understand or find meaning in her death. It makes sense, then, that silence would still figure into his poetry, for underlying every word of these poems is the impossibility of expressing the emotion he feels. Still, as briefly noted earlier, Roubaud also recognizes the necessity of naming, as it provides a sort of stability for her identity and memory.

> Saying your name I would give you an unassailable stability
>
> So that your negative would be opposed, not to an affirmation (you are not), but to the void before my words
>
> Saying your name means reigniting the presence you were before you disappeared
>
> And at the same time gives this disappearance a status different from, and more than, pure and simple absence, a secondary status (*SB* 84)[168]

There are clearly dueling forces at work on Roubaud's expression: on one hand, the trauma of his loss is unnamable, while on the other, he can only function by naming it.

Another aspect of Roubaud's mourning process is the gradual acceptance of the reality of the situation. Demonstrating another paradoxical tension, his poetry vacillates between reflections on the possibility of multiple simultaneous realities (which could seemingly allow him to choose to inhabit the most desirable), and a contrasting sense of absolute closure on the finality of what he knows to be true. Openness would allow Roubaud to escape from what could seem a mere nightmare; however, only recognition of closure can result in mourning and eventually a return to some kind of equilibrium. Similarly, the passage of time can only be marked in a world without infinite openness. If there are many possible worlds, Roubaud also

[168] "En te nommant je voudrais te donner une stabilité hors de toute atteinte / La négation de toi alors s'opposera non à l'affirmation (tu n'es pas) mais au néant qui est avant ma parole / Te nommer c'est faire briller la présence d'un être antérieur à la disparition / Donner au même moment à cette disparition un statut autre et plus que la pure, que la simple absence, un statut second" (*QN* 87).

reflects that there must be a sort of perpetual present. He imagines the possibility: "The novel takes place in several possible worlds. In some, the woman is not dead. / The time is the present. The time of each possible world is the present" (*QN* 49).[169] The possibilities will continue until there is some proof that they have been limited: "When there is only one world left, where she is dead, the novel is finished" (*SB* 50).[170] Roubaud, however, devises tactics for delaying the inevitable for as long as possible: "The telephone does not ring. As long as it does not ring, that new world, that possible world, is still possible. It is still possible that the phone will ring and the voice will be the voice of the woman he loves, who is dead. Who is no longer dead, has never died" (*QN* 52).[171] Still, despite the desire to maintain certain openings of possibility, Roubaud also recognizes and notes the finality of the situation: "Through simple repetition of *there is no more* the whole unravels into its loathsome fabric: reality. / Some thing black which closes in. locks shut. pure, unaccomplished deposition" (*SB* 74).[172] Similar to this image of something that doubles back on itself, Roubaud describes his situation as a circular mirror, which would both limit any external elements but multiply internal ones to perpetuity: "Within this mirror, circular, virtual, closed. language has no power" (*SB* 65).[173] The image of the circular mirror incorporates both limitation and unending possibility, while also stripping language of its power. Because both are contained in a single image, the contrast between insular containment and infinite possibility is thus less sharply distinguishable than it might initially seem. This blending of infinite possibility and complete limitation is something that seems, in some ways, inherent in

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[169] "Le roman se passe dans plusieurs mondes possibles. Dans certains, la jeune femme n'est pas morte. / Le temps est le présent. le temps de chaque monde possible est le présent" (*QN* 51).
[170] "Quand il n'y a plus qu'un seul monde, où elle est morte, le roman est fini" (*QN* 52).
[171] "Le téléphone ne sonne pas. Tant qu'il ne sonne pas le nouveau monde, le monde possible est encore possible. Il est encore possible que le téléphone sonne, et que la voix qui vienne soit la voix de la femme aimée, et morte. Ayant cessé d'être morte, ne l'ayant jamais été" (*QN* 54).
[172] "Par la simple réitération, *il n'y a plus*, les touts se défont en leur tissu abominable : la réalité. / Quelque chose noir qui se referme. et se boucle. une déposition pure, inaccomplie" (*QN* 76).
[173] "Dans ce miroir, circulaire, virtuel et fermé. le langage n'a pas de pouvoir" (*QN* 67).

language itself. Blanchot describes a similar image in "Interruption": "To write: to trace a circle in the interior of which would come to be inscribed the outside of every circle" (*IC* 79).[174] Like other seemingly contradictory elements (such as black and white, or silence and expression), the two contribute to a sort of wholeness from which neither is excluded.

As Roubaud processes his loss, the concrete reality of death becomes increasingly apparent. The chasm death creates is not only between himself and his wife, but also within her own self; in dying, she has established a parity between herself and death, which consequently fragments her self. Roubaud explores the effect of death on the self by using a repetition of "*même*," stressing the identity of each component to itself and to the other, as in "Death itself-self. identical with itself-self" (*SB* 14).[175] The pronoun "*elle*" in the French is ambiguous, for while it nearly always refers to Roubaud's wife, here it should grammatically refer to the feminine noun "*mort,*" or death. Alix Cléo had used nearly the same formulation in her own journal, but in reference to love rather than death: "love itself-self.Identical with itself-self" (*Journal* 14).[176] In Roubaud's version, the identity between the woman and death is like a corruption of the union that the two had previously shared and that allowed each of them to approach the world both as two and one:

> The world of one who would be two: not solipsism, *biipsism*
>
> The figure one, but as if moved into a mirror, into two facing mirrors [. . .]
>
> Different, inseparable (*SB* 47)[177]

The new union between the beloved and death is vertiginous for Roubaud, resulting in a "sheer abyss of love" (*SB* 13).[178] It is out of this abyss that Roubaud writes, making his starting point a

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[174] "Écrire : tracer un cercle à l'intérieur duquel viendrait s'inscrire le dehors de tout cercle" (*EI* 112).
[175] "la mort même même, identique à elle même même" (*QN* 15).
[176] "l'amour même même.Identique à lui-même même."
[177] "Le monde d'un seul, mais qui aurait été deux : pas un solipsisme, un *biipsisme* / Le nombre un, mais comme bougé dans un miroir, dans deux miroirs se faisant face [. . .] / Différents, inséparables" (*QN* 49).

sort of present absence, a blank space, a silence preceding the word. Perhaps because it acts as an impossible foundation, the blankness remains quietly present throughout the work, shadowing the ink on the page and the authorial voice.

With silence being a significant and paradoxical element in the work, other senses also step in to create a fuller exploration of the mourning process. The sense of sight has already been examined above in conjunction with photography and the gaze. Roubaud figures other senses to descend in a spiral akin to that of Dante's Inferno:

> One descends in a spiral, a damnation.
>
> From sight to voice. from the voice to whiffs of scent, odors.
>
> From odor to taste: bite, crunch, spittle.
>
> The bottom of the well. The last interior: touch.
>
> Absolute touch of bodies. orgasm and decomposition.
>
> The touching of hands, of flesh, of bodies coexisting in one body, one mental space, saying it with mouth, taste, breath, an intertwining that breathes and penetrates.
>
> In meditating on the five senses, here was my recollection of mortality [. . .]
>
> All stations that I now descend, through memory, to hell. (*SB* 80)[179]

Writing, of course, does not figure into the physical senses. Based on earlier reflections on writing and images, it is interesting that the visual component is the least intimate of all, perhaps because it is the least embodied and necessarily implies distance between subject and object.

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[178] "gouffre pur de l'amour" (*QN* 15).

[179] "On y descend par une spirale, une damnation. / De la vue, à la voix. de la voix, au souffle, parfum, odeurs. / De l'odeur au goût : mordre, enfoncer, salives. / Fond du puits, intérieur ultime est le toucher. / Le toucher absolu du corps. la jouissance et la décomposition. / Le toucher des mains, de la chair, la coexistence en un même lieu mental, en un même corps des corps, le dire dans la bouche, le goût, le souffle, l'entrelacement qui respire pénètre. / Pour la méditation des cinq sens, là était la recollection de mortalité [. . .] / Toutes stations que maintenant je descends en enfer, par le souvenir" (*QN* 82-3).

Conclusion

Silence is both a tool for Roubaud and an adversary. While he makes use of silence in his text to suggest the unspeakable, he also must confront the overwhelming silence created by his loss. Silence is present from the first line, in which Roubaud configures it as an enemy. In the same line, he sets himself apart from others in similar situations by claiming that he will not be attempting to establish an understanding of himself, nor will he take either consolation or pain from the process. Roubaud frames his purpose negatively from the outset of the collection, noting what the work will *not* be. By doing so, he gives priority to silence and to the unspoken. The frequent aporetic elements of the collection indicate spaces where expression is impossible: the blurred opposition of black and white, for instance, which do not consistently connote a single set of associations, and the uncertain tension between silence and expression. *Quelque chose noir* as a work of literature indicates the fruitful conclusion of both the work of writing and the work of mourning, while also beautifully capturing the nuances of those processes.

V. Ludic Approaches to Loss: Julio Cortázar and Macedonio Fernández

Sometimes the unsayable manifests itself through an author's playful approach to a tragic situation rather than through silence. This is the case both for Julio Cortázar in *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*[180] and for Macedonio Fernández in *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna.*[181] In these works, loss both acts as a creative impetus and weighs heavily on the text despite the otherwise playful nature of the latter. Creating a ludic work as a means of processing loss allows these two writers to say what otherwise could not be said, for the element of play relieves the heaviness of mourning and enables the writer to include aspects of loss without being overcome by them. The lightheartedness of their texts provides the avenue for expression following loss, and yet also disguises the depth of the trauma through a sort of alternative silence. Playfulness functions in a similar way to fragmentation in the work of Jabès, or white space and use of image in the poetry of Roubaud: in all of these instances, the writers approach the idea of loss in an indirect way, thus circumventing the silencing effects of trauma.

In the case of Cortázar in *Los autonautas*, his wife was both fellow traveler in what is essentially a travel log and also co-author of the work itself. The journey that they take, spending over a month traveling from Paris to Marseille without exiting the autoroute, has no purpose apart from the unusual challenge of the experience itself. The two subvert the highway's reason for existence—quick transport from one place to another—in favor of a journey that gives no sense of being a mere means to an end. After all, once they reach their goal of Marseille, they must almost immediately return along the same highway to get back home. Cortázar and Dunlop enjoy the frivolity of their journey, documenting each step with photographs, diagrams, menus, and stories; they feign seriousness despite the apparent triviality of their undertaking. Only in the

[180] 1983, co-written with his wife, Carol Dunlop; Eng. trans. Anne McLean, 2007.
[181] Published posthumously in 1967; Eng. trans. Margaret Schwartz, forthcoming in 2010.

final pages does the reader learn of the tragedy that awaits them at the end of the voyage; the news gives the sense that perhaps the couple drew out the normally quick journey as long as possible in an attempt to stall time. The playful tone of their tale becomes bittersweet with the knowledge that Cortázar had to complete the final writing and editing alone. The loss of his wife had been an unknown factor to the reader for almost the entire account, and yet it becomes a powerful presence and even the impetus for the book's production. Loss, then, is at the root of the text, and yet remains unspoken for nearly all of the work.

Similarly, the loss of his wife Elena seems to have been a strong creative impetus for Macedonio in *Museo*.[182] The text is light and comic, and yet it becomes apparent that the stories and characters revolve around an absence—that of the character referred to as La Eterna, who seems at times not only to be a character, but also to suggest Macedonio's beloved wife, Elena, who died before he wrote the book. La Eterna desires life and presence, but cannot attain it; she is never present, and yet she is the motivating force for the characters, who attempt to push their way from the pages into reality on her behalf. The theme of love in the face of the certainty of death is powerful throughout the text. Macedonio's text is delightful in its creativity, playfulness, and self-reflexivity, and yet the smile is again a melancholy one, for the trauma of Macedonio's loss always rests quietly just below the surface of the words.

Creating a ludic work as a means of processing loss provides an avenue to say what could not otherwise be said for these two writers. The lightheartedness of their texts allows for an indirect but genuine expression of mourning, and yet also disguises the depth of the trauma in a way that mirrors other forms of experimentation that I describe in other chapters. The absence of the two authors' loved ones is rarely mentioned or alluded to, and yet the texts would not exist without those losses.

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[182] This statement is disputed; see footnote 4, as well as Schwartz xv-xx.

Slowing Down the Clock: Time, Space, and Autonauts

One of the key elements that Cortázar and Dunlop seek to manipulate on their journey is the passage of time. The book bears the subtitle "A Timeless Voyage from Paris to Marseilles,"[183] suggesting the possibility that the days on the road somehow remove the couple from the normal progression of time. The use of the label "timeless" is ironic, as the voyage is in fact time-bound in many different ways, most of which were arbitrary rules determined by the co-writers themselves. While timelessness can also suggest an eternal quality, the writers' fixation on temporality encourages a reading that focuses on the role of time itself. The couple set a specific time allotment for their trip: thirty-three days, no more, no less. They required themselves to stay overnight in every second rest stop. They wrote meticulously about their adventures, creating a travel memoir; because the act of writing assumes an implied reader, doing so also creates a future temporal experience of reading the book (for reading, unlike observing a painting, is done in a more or less linear fashion that requires a certain amount of time). Most significantly, though, the trip is bound to the past; it may function as a source of nostalgia for Cortázar looking back from the present, but it can never be recreated. Dunlop died a short time after the trip, and the resulting book, which Cortázar had to complete and edit without her, bears her trace and testifies to her memory, but cannot perpetuate her life. The book thus becomes a work of mourning for Cortázar, who must retrace the journey from beginning to end as a writer in order to emerge from his loss and continue with his future.

In addition to the timelessness created by the journey's simultaneous engagement with past, present, and future, the trip is also outside of time in its subversion of the use of the highway. Normally serving the simple purpose of connecting two places, a highway, much like

[183] "Un viaje atemporal París-Marsella."

an airport, is neither one nor the other. To treat the strip of asphalt not as a thoroughfare but as a destination distorts both the time one normally spends there, and the spaces that are normally significant to the highway's intended users. In his article "Everyday Odysseys," Warren Motte notes that while "apart from that intermediacy" the autoroute is usually thought of as meaningless, in this case, "the key gesture [. . .] is to reconsider—and substantially reconfigure—the very notion of intermediacy" (*EO* 85-86). By refusing to comply with the expected uses of the highway and its rest stops, Cortázar and Dunlop sense that they are able to exist outside of both time and space. As they put it, "we had the impression of having achieved a cruising speed thanks to which the freeway transformed into a kind of hidden land, inaccessible to any rhythm other than our own" (*AC* 184).[184] This passage makes it clear that the couple's pace was an essential component to the possibility of discovering something beyond the ordinary within the confines of the highway. There are at least two ways of perceiving space and time along the road: the standard one, which is measured by miles and by the clock; and the hidden, which touches on the hidden, the infinite, and the eternal, and is thus immeasurable. Oddly, though the entire purpose of their trip was to stay on the autoroute for an extensive amount of time, the highway becomes decidedly secondary to their experience as they only drive for a few minutes each day before stopping for several hours or overnight. They note that "what should have been the fundamental thing, travelling slowly down the Autoroute du Sud, lost all importance from the very first day. The symptoms of the freeway—monotony, obsessive time and space, fatigue—do not exist for us; as soon as we get on it we get off again and forget it for five, ten hours, all night long" (*AC* 103).[185] By spending so much time on the freeway's edge, it disappears into the

[184] "teníamos la impresión de haber alcanzado una velocidad de crucero gracias a la cual la autopista se transformaba en una especie de tierra oculta, inaccesible a todo ritmo que no fuera el nuestro" (*AC* 160).
[185] "esto que hubiera debido ser lo fundamental, recorrer lentamente la autopista del sur, perdió toda importancia desde el primer día. Los síntomas de la autopista—monotonía, tiempo y espacio obsesivos, fatiga—no existen para

background of their unusual trip, foregrounding instead the couple themselves. This shift implies that by altering the rules of the game and using the highway in an unintended way, it becomes possible for them to notice things that are effectively invisible to others traveling the same route.

The way that the protagonists perceive time throughout their journey also sparks a question about movement, stasis, and progress, for forward motion is essential, but stopping is equally necessary. Something about the combination of movement and stasis unlocks the ability for them to create a story from an otherwise banal experience. The epigraph, a few lines from *Avalovara* by Osman Lins (1975), broaches the topic even before Cortázar and Dunlop begin to recount their experience. "How to narrate the trip and describe the river along which—another river—the trip exists, in such a way that it emphasizes, in the text, the most hidden and lasting face of the event, that where the event, without beginning and without end, challenges us, moving and unmoving?" (*AC* 11)[186]. While Cortázar and Dunlop are, of course, progressing southward day by day, they also have the impression of motionlessness due to feeling suspended in both time and space. This has largely to do with the difference in speed and mentality between themselves and the other motorists. By deliberately removing themselves from the desire to move from one point to another at the greatest possible speed, the vehicles and drivers that are doing so become irrelevant. They note that despite the fact that their journey is what makes the book possible, their own forward motion has been reduced to negligible importance, as has the final destination: "It will really be a surprise, I think, to see at the end that we've also advanced according to the criteria of others; I mean we'll have arrived in Marseille in spite of the

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nosotros; apenas entramos en ella volvemos a salir y la olvidamos por cinco, diez horas, por toda una noche" (*AC* 90-91).

[186] "¿Cómo narrar el viaje y describir el río a lo largo del cual—otro rio—existe el viaje, de tal modo que resalte, en el texto, aquella fase más recóndita y duradera del evento, aquella donde el evento, sin comienzo ni fin, nos desafío, móvil e inmóvil?" (*AC* 10).

immobility that characterizes us" (*AC* 132).[187] The fact that the trip itself is both essential and secondary signals the importance for the reader to read constantly on multiple levels; not only should the reader be aware of the details of the voyage, but also of the questions that the trip and its narration raise (about writing and the complexities of human relationships, for instance). The seeming immobility of the couple functions as an escape, partly from what they refer to as the "demons" that had been haunting them—bizarre accidents around the home, illnesses, and so on. When Cortázar notes that "nothing, afterwards, even admirable travels and hours of perfect harmony, could surpass that month outside of time, that interior month where we knew for the first and last time what absolute happiness was," there is a distinct note of sadness in his words (*AC* 351-2). By escaping from time and making the hands of the clock seem motionless, they bought themselves pure happiness that they would never be able to repeat.

In a sense, Cortázar and Dunlop conflate the present moment with a sense of infinite time, or eternity. By disengaging themselves from the normal flow of time and the quick pace of moving from one location to another, they seek to live entirely in the present, with little connection to past or future. In doing so, the instant of the present becomes eternal, at least in terms of their perception of it; though at the same time, when the reader encounters that present moment captured in writing, it is imbued with nostalgia and loss because of its existence as a real moment in time prior to Dunlop's fatal illness. The reader may be more aware of the time-bound nature of the trip, whereas Cortázar and Dunlop focus on its timeless quality. When the couple does try to consider the trip as something that actually exists in time, they become overwhelmed: "The truth is we're a little overwhelmed by this beginning of the trip [. . .] tons of books to read, the preparation of reports that, in the future, you will be reading in the present, which for us will

[187] "Será realmente una sorpresa, creo, ver al final que hemos avanzado también según los criterios de los demás, quiero decir que habremos llegado a Marsella a pesar de la inmovilidad que nos caracteriza" (*AC* 115).

already be long past" (*AC* 46).[188] They don't dwell on this feeling for long, though, and quickly allow themselves to become captivated by the present moment alone. In a way, time becomes delineated by their slow passage through space: "it's the stages of the journey and not clocks that mark time, because deep down we are outside of time in the same way we're outside the freeway" (*AC* 132).[189] Even space is affected by their mode of traveling, though, and seems to stretch out infinitely in a way similar to time, with each rest area being an extension of the previous. In his article "The End of Temporality," Fredric Jameson discusses the changing perception of both space and time through the modern and postmodern periods, noting especially the difficulty of separating the two. He addresses a phenomenon similar to that experienced by Cortázar and Dunlop: that of isolating the present moment to such a degree that it takes on properties of the infinite. As he says,

> whenever one attempts to escape a situatedness in the past and the future or in other words to escape our being-in-time as such, the temporal present offers a rather flimsy support and a doubtful or fragile autonomy. It thus inevitably comes to be thickened and solidified, complemented, by a rather more metaphysical backing or content, which is none other than the idea of eternity itself. (*ET* 712)

While Jameson does not paint this move as something desirable—indeed, he thinks it "always overshoots the mark and ends up in a nontemporality" (*ET* 712)—it is a useful way of understanding how Cortázar and Dunlop focus on the eternal and timeless qualities of their trip rather than the time that passes, and may indicate why they take such an approach.

Jameson's article starts by addressing the premise that the concern of modernity was time,

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[188] "La verdad es que estamos un poco aplastados por este comienzo del viaje [. . .] montones de libros que nos proponemos leer, la preparación de los informes que, en el futuro, usted estará leyendo en su presente que para nosotros será ya un largo pasado" (*AC* 41).

[189] "las etapas y no los relojes fabricando el tiempo, anulándolo porque en el fondo estamos fuera del tiempo de la misma manera que estamos fuera de la autopista" (*AC* 115).

while the concern of postmodernity is primarily space. He notes the fallacy of the limited scope of this premise, focusing on the fact that anything rooted in language is necessarily bound to temporality:

> But to position language at the center of things is also to foreground temporality, for whether one comes at it from the sentence or the speech act, from presence or the coeval, from comprehension or the transmission of signs and signals, temporality is not merely presupposed but becomes the ultimate object or ground of analysis. What I have here been calling space therefore risks becoming a misnomer. Always and everywhere we have rather to do with something that happens to time; or perhaps, as space is mute and time loquacious, we are able to make an approach to spatiality only by way of what it does to time. (*ET* 706)

This passage highlights the fundamental irony of *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*: despite the fact that the trip is bound in a literal way within time and space, and that the experiences of both writing and reading are similarly dependent on the passage of time, the entire project rests on the premise of attempting to break out of those confines. In his article "*Los autonautas de la cosmopista*: Una vía de conocimiento," Jacques Leenhardt emphasizes the tension between timelessness and natural limitations:

> This precision brings to light and raises here the paradox of a space-time (the voyage), lacking time. This contradiction reveals itself to be full of meaning if we then underline that, in the continuation of time, space also disappears. The rest areas are all the same because they are, above all, parking lots and as a result they are no more than an opportunity, renewed each day, for the traveler to project his or her persona and affinities. (Leenhardt 16, my translation)

By establishing equality among all rest areas, they all become instances of the same reality, without significant differences to separate them. The travelers thus move through time and space in a way that seems to negate that very movement, creating the illusion that they are both perpetually traveling and never progressing.

Overall, the trip that they take functions as a sort of insulation from the possibility of trauma, even though it ended in sadness. By thinking about their trip as being outside of time and space, they allow it to become an alternate environment in which they are immune from the normal risks that they face. At one point, the couple notices barbed wire that separates the rest area property from the outside world, and perceives it as being the barbed wire of concentration camps (*AC* 127). While the barbed wire is a boundary for them, keeping them from penetrating deeper into the woods, they actually see it as a safety net. In this case, the wire is not locking them in, but keeping pain and danger away from them for the duration of their journey. The image seems incongruous and exaggerated, for there is certainly no threat nearly as severe as that implied by the image of a concentration camp, and yet it shows that the two find freedom within the confines of their journey rather than outside of it. By using such a sharp image, the writers indicate the degree of protection that the trip affords them. The way the pair view the fence indicates that the categories of inside and outside have been reconfigured in a way that undermines the reader's expectations. This reversal is similar to the recasting of categories of banality and significance. The couple finds safety in the barbed wire that locks them into their journey, and they attribute significance to the seemingly trivial details of the trip. While the premise of their trip seems banal in many ways, it nonetheless staves off death and suffering.

Cortázar and Dunlop undoubtedly suggest an elimination of time and space (or at least a desire to move beyond them); yet at the same time, they highlight the paradoxical nature of time

and space by including elements in their book that, rather than deny or move beyond time and space, instead serve to concretize them. In particular, their inclusion of photographs, sketches, and "scientific observations" pins various moments of the narrative to specific, definable times and places. The reader knows the couple is aware of time passing, because each step of the journey (getting on and off the highway, drinking coffee, eating a meal) is noted down to the minute. Likewise, it is clear that they progress in space as well, as we see images of each progressive rest stop. I will explore the function of the photographs shortly, as they are an important representation of the unsayable, but I find it important to signal their function here as contrasting the atemporality that is otherwise so prevalent.

"That which pushes the words away"

Since both of the people on the expedition are writers, they demonstrate a natural and consistent concern with the process of writing and how it does or does not adequately define their experience. One of the mock-serious rules of the game for Cortázar and Dunlop is that they will take scientific notes to record every step of their voyage, and they frequently take advantage of posturing as serious writers doing important work in order to deflect curious stares. Writing, then, is at times mere pretense, a means of hiding the true purpose of their trip. The genuine purpose, though, is also writing: not scientific observations, but the novel that has ended up in the reader's hands. Puzzled by how to spend their time, they ask themselves: "how shall we proceed? Apart from the fundamental rules of the game, we haven’t got the slightest clue. Write. But maybe not directly: events need a little time to turn into words. As if their sense, and even

their form, should travel a long interior path before finding their cohesion" (*AC* 53).[190] The journey will end as writing, but the writing itself must first imitate the travels. If it is possible to capture their experience in language, they feel they must first move away from words in order to do so. In an early chapter, the couple includes a poem by Jean Charcot in which someone writing his memoirs seeks "that which pushes the words away" (*Around the South Pole*; quoted in *AC 18*).[191] Just as this character must distance himself from words (literally, with an eraser) in order properly to complete his written memoirs, Cortázar and Dunlop also turn away from words at times in order, eventually, to write them. As they note in the passage above, they need a certain amount of distance from the events that they recount in order to write about them in a satisfying way. An intermediary step, that of silence, must occur between the event and the story of it. This need for silence prior to narration is particularly true in instances of loss, as the traumatic event naturally resists being distilled into language, as I have illustrated in previous chapters.

Components other than words make up an important part of the book: diagrams, observations, and most importantly, photographs. By including these non-verbal elements in the finished book, Cortázar and Dunlop bring the reader's attention to all that cannot be expressed in words alone. The photographs capture the depth of their tenderness (Carol gazing softly at the camera while a hotel mirror reflects both her and Julio) and the extent of their absurdity (Julio, shirtless, wearing a traffic cone at a rest stop they presume to be a grave site for tortured witches). Cortázar and Dunlop are certainly aware of the importance of elements that do not translate well into words; these include emotional encounters such as "Embraces, pats on the

[190] "¿cómo vamos a proceder? Aparte de las reglas fundamentales del juego, no tenemos la menor idea. Escribir. Pero tal vez no directamente: los acontecimientos necesitan un poco de tiempo para volverse palabra. Como si su sentido, e incluso su forma, debieran recorrer un largo camino interior antes de encontrar su cohesión" (*AC* 47).
[191] "la que aleja las palabras" (*AC* 15).

back, slightly anxious glances, and that gratitude one never manages to express" (*AC* 29).[192] Photographs can often depict such emotion with more clarity, because a viewer is typically accustomed to interpreting myriad silent glances in any given day. Including both text and photographs contributes to the fullness of the reader's interpretive experience. The visual elements undoubtedly complement the text, but at the same time, because they are not directly part of the text, they also make the reader aware of the limitations of language.

The parallels of travel and writing or reading are apparent from the beginning of the book and the journey. Both have a powerful temporal component and a sense of progress towards an end point (though this is obscured for the reasons discussed above). The couple frequently refers to the book as travel, or the trip as an experience of reading, as when they dub it a "dialogue-made-journey" (*AC* 194).[193] Still, there are times on their trip that they are resistant to writing, and it is perhaps these moments that prompt the inclusion of photographs. In *Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar*, Dominic Moran addresses the way photography functions in other stories by Cortázar: "Again, the delimited interior of the photograph has a complex relation with what lies 'beyond', seeming both to contain it (but then the outside becomes the inside) and be riven by it (but then the outside was never simply the inside)" (Moran 87). The edge of an image thus acts as a limit for the image's contents, but it can also be seen as something that is pierced by the image (i.e., the blank page that is marked and marred by the printed image). Whether one considers the image or the background to take priority, it is clear that the two elements, while different from one another, exist in a complex relationship. He goes on to discuss this question of limits through the lens of Jacques Derrida's ideas in *La vérité en peinture*, which also explores where a work of art begins and ends, notably focusing on the frame

[192] "Abrazos, palmoteos, miradas siempre un poco inquietas, y esa gratitud que nunca se consigue expresar" (*AC* 26).
[193] "diálogo hecho viaje" (*AC* 167).

of such a work. The question of framing as a way of limiting or expanding the work of art is something that is particularly important in *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, which I will explore in a moment, but in *Los autonautas* it is also significant. The printed book consists of the text of the novel and standard paratextual elements (such as the cover and copyright page), as well as sketches, timelines, quotations, and photographs. The question of limits, edges, and framing could be raised in regards to the role of the supplementary material—is it truly something in addition to the text, or is it an integral part of the text itself? Similarly, the span of their journey can most clearly be marked off by the actual days and nights spent on the highway, but the experience of the trip also comprises preparations, memories, and future plans. The photographs that appear in the book are themselves in a position that is both part of the text and external to it (because they are something other than language), and thus they help demonstrate the complexity of defining what exactly is within the borders of a text. Returning to the passage by Moran quoted above, a photograph provides the viewer with a glimpse of a particular scene, but it also creates a more acute awareness of the things the viewer cannot see just beyond the edge of the image. The same could be said of language, for a story may raise questions in the reader as to what has been left out, but the visual nature a photograph arguably does so in a more immediate way. By including photographs, Cortázar and Dunlop encourage the reader to raise such questions about individual elements of the book, as well as the work as a whole.

Photographs, then, are a way of suggesting something that cannot be expressed in words alone—a glance, or a certain play or light and shadow—and yet a photograph also limits the free reign of the imagination by providing a certain proof of what a scene looks like in an objective way. Photography can also trick the eye, of course, but here it serves mainly as a straightforward proof or illustration, and also as a counterpoint to writing. There are some explicit considerations

of the differences between the craft of photography and that of writing, such as in the following passage; it is unclear whether Cortázar or Dunlop narrates:

> Only a photograph, perhaps, and I didn't have my camera with me, could have let it be seen as I saw it. How does this transformation work, that passage from the subjective power of the eye to what is photographed? [. . .] Just as literature cannot be explained as the simple management of words—since at least in societies called developed the whole adult population makes use of 'techniques' of written language—the attraction and magic of photography cannot be explained by technical know-how. When you get right down to it, do the photographer and writer not participate in a single process, just using different tools?
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> But the transformation of the story of the angel—making it pass from the untaken photograph to the written fiction—will take some time yet. (*AC* 314)[194]

The writer speaks in this passage of a certain transformation in both writing and photography, as though reality passed through the artist as through a lens and underwent a fundamental change before emerging at the other side. In the writer's estimation, a photograph would provide quicker proof, and also a more stable reception by the viewer to ensure that he or she sees the scene in the same way as the artist. Language, however, seems to open up a greater possibility for interpretation, and also requires more time, both for the writer and the reader. The writer can never be certain that the reader will understand the event in the same way. Still, it is precisely that possibility for interpretation that contributes to the richness of the written text. The notion

[194] "Sólo la fotografía, acaso, y yo no llevaba mi cámara, hubiera podido darlo a ver como lo vi. ¿De qué manera se opera esa transformación, ese pasaje del poder subjetivo del ojo a lo que es fotografiado? [. . .] Así como la literatura no puede explicarse por el simple manejo de las palabras—puesto que por lo menos en las sociedades que llaman desarrolladas toda la población adulta dispone de 'técnicas' de la lengua escrita—, tampoco puede explicarse el atractivo y la magia de la fotografía por los conocimientos técnicos. En el fondo, ¿no participan el fotógrafo y el escritor de un mismo proceso, sólo que utilizan útiles diferentes? / Pero la transformación de la historia del ángel—hacerlo pasar de la foto que no fue tomada a la ficción escrita—llevaría todavía tiempo" (*AC* 276-77).

that "Writing is always accepting the risk of telling all, even—and especially—unknowingly" (*AC* 139)[195] suggests that meaning is not only created at the time of transcribing words onto a page, but also as the reader encounters those words, discovering more than the writer perhaps intended to unveil.

[195] "Escribir es siempre aceptar el riesgo de decirlo todo, incluso—y sobre todo—sin saberlo" (*AC* 120).

Loss and Absence on the Road

After the reader has shared Cortázar and Dunlop's journey, Cortázar's postscript telling of Dunlop's death just a few months following is shattering. His choice to reveal this to the reader once the journey is complete allows the reader to participate emotionally in the joyful experiences of the couple, casting sorrow over the expedition only after it has been completed. Approaching the text with this loss already in mind (as in a rereading, or with background knowledge) allows the reader to pick up on a more somber nuance that underlies the playfulness of the couple. Shadows of emptiness color many of the couple's joyful moments together, and the possibility of absence is seen as sinister. The threatening nature of absence is not absolute, however; at times, Cortázar and Dunlop also depict it as a space of potential and renewal. It is impossible to know how the book changed with Cortázar's final edits after Dunlop's death, but it seems that the interplay of joy and sorrow allows Cortázar to mourn the loss of his wife while still celebrating their journey.

The question of absence and presence is raised early on through the narrative, especially in the first person plural. The novel's jacket notes indicate that Cortázar and Dunlop wrote the book together; they in turn notify the reader that the drawings were the work of Dunlop's son, Stéphane Hébert. In regards to his role, they state: "And so, although absent at the time, Stéphane Hébert is as much a presence here as Fafner or ourselves" (*AC* 22).[196] The statement is phrased in such a way as to allow for the simultaneity of absence and presence. On a first reading, it is Hébert who is both present and absent; he did not take part in the journey, and yet his presence is a part of the text through his drawings that illustrate each rest area. Dunlop herself, though, is equally situated between presence and absence. Her presence was integral in the trip itself and

[196] "Así, y aunque ausente de hecho, Stéphane Hébert es aquí una presencia tan manifiesta como la de Fafner o la nuestra" (*AC* 19).

also in the text, and yet by the time of the text's completion she can no longer share in it. Cortázar is careful to mention the absence in a way that does not negate the profundity or significance of presence. Hébert is far less significant to the book than Dunlop, and yet by writing about his ambiguous presence/absence in this way, Cortázar makes it possible for the reader to think about Dunlop in the same way—essential to the story and very much present in the spirit and voice of the text, and yet also painfully absent.

While absence and presence may coexist in some ways, absence also enters the text as something menacing and beyond comprehension, though even as a threat, the writers often approach it through the mode of play. One playful way that Cortázar and Dunlop discuss the threat of the void pertains to highway trucks and their mysterious cargo. After rejecting several possible reasons for the lack of information or advertising on some trucks (including the possibility of embarrassing cargo), the two agree that the most frightening possibility is that the trucks carry nothing at all: "But the extreme hypothesis, which we both agree on without plucking up the courage to believe in too much, is that all those trucks are *empty*, and that they belong to a Scottish eccentric who amuses himself by making them come and go all over the place and receiving weekly reports on the faces of the customs agents when they open them" (*AC* 228). If the trucks carry nothing, they become an irrational presence on the highway, traveling from one place to another for no verifiable reason. Interestingly, Cortázar and Dunlop's presence is equally illogical, and yet because they know their own reasons for the journey, it does not present the same threat as an empty cargo truck barreling down the freeway.

Absence is threatening, then, partly because it fractures the frame of understanding. There may not be much at stake when contemplating the contents of a truck, but when the absence instead concerns the loss of a loved one who contributes to the way an individual

approaches and understands the world, the consequences are far more significant. The shadow of loss makes both speech and silence difficult: "Your voice is clear, but when that veil of sadness comes, when the journey has barely begun and you again doubt its end, how can I be silent, and how can I speak? In its time that sadness, my love, in its still distant and double time" (*AC* 285).[197] Because sadness and emptiness are difficult to face with logic (as in the case of the trucks), with words, or with silence, Cortázar and Dunlop invent an alternate method of approaching them: as tangible enemies. The two frequently personify problems of all types as demons, which creates the possibility of facing them (or avoiding them) as with real enemies (see *AC* 27 for instance). Though the creatures may be imaginary, by attributing physical characteristics to them, it becomes easier to imagine the source of a problem and either conquer it or flee from it. The timing of their trip had partly to do with such "demons." To succeed on the journey would be to succeed against all that threatened them:

> Somehow, to prove we could carry out this trip was to prove to ourselves that we had weapons against the gloom, not just in its large manifestations like the one that had just left us so fragile, but also in its more insidious expressions, the banality of daily obligations, those commitments that mean nothing in themselves but all together distance us from that center where we all hope to live our lives. (*AC* 37)[198]

The playful approach to the trip, together with the idea that their enemies can be definitively conquered, contributes to the mock-heroic style that they use to recount their tale. Cortázar and

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[197] "Tu voz es clara, pero cuando viene ese velo de tristeza, cuando apenas empezado el viaje dudas nuevamente de su término, ¿cómo callarme, y cómo hablar? A su tiempo esa tristeza, mi amor, a su tiempo todavía lejano y doble" (*AC* 250).

[198] "De alguna manera, probar que podíamos llevar a cabo ese viaje era probarnos que teníamos armas contra lo tenebroso, no sólo en sus grandes manifestaciones como la que acababa de dejarnos tan frágiles, sino también en sus expresiones más solapadas, la banalidad de las obligaciones cotidianas, esos compromisos que no significan nada en sí mismos pero que en conjunto alejan cada vez más de ese centro donde cada uno espera vivir su vida" (*AC* 33).

Dunlop treat the simple but strange voyage as an expedition with serious stakes.

Despite the threat inherent in loss, the two writers also envision trauma as a catalyst for change and renewal. As such, they try to accept the difficulties they encounter and move on with new understanding. As they observe, "You know, gentle reader, that each time one truly avoids dying, the result is a true birth, even more precarious and painful when one emerges from the darkness with no other mother than oneself, with no other contraction than a will not always fully understood" (*AC* 29).[199] This hopeful emotion does not make light of the difficulty of trauma, as they recognize how "precarious" and "painful" the experience can be, but it acknowledges the possibility of growth and progress after such pain. Indeed, part of the joy of their trip stems from the fact that Dunlop seems to have had a health scare shortly prior to its beginning: "the dark forces seized Osita, and for days and nights it seemed they'd won the match. However, the demons didn't know that Little Bears soak up light even in the darkness, and as a last resort can even duplicate its intensity, especially when el Lobo, in the shadow of an impassable border, draws them away from the bright side" (*AC* 28).[200] Again Cortázar here envisions the couple's challenges as adversaries; by conquering them, they take even greater pleasure in their trip.

Cortázar's expression of hopefulness and rebirth takes on particular significance considering that he faced such painful loss as he completed the writing of the book. When he recounts the end of their journey and the loss of his wife, his tone is far more somber; and yet, playfulness remains the most prevalent mode for the majority of the novel. Early in the story, he

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[199] "Sabe, pálido lector, que cada vez que uno se abstiene verdaderamente de morir, resulta de eso un verdadero nacimiento, tanto más precario y doloroso en cuanto se emerge de las tinieblas sin otra madre que uno mismo, sin otra contracción que una voluntad que no siempre se alcanza a comprender muy bien" (*AC* 26).

[200] "las fuerzas oscuras se apoderaron de la Osita, y durante días y noches pareció que iban a ganar la partida. Sin embargo los demonios ignoraban que las Ositas captan la luz incluso en la oscuridad y hasta saben duplicar su intensidad en última instancia, sobre todo cuando el Lobo, en la sombra de una frontera infranqueable, las atrae del buen lado" (*AC* 25).

admits his weariness at facing repeated difficulties: "if those trips to the land of gloom tire the traveller, they exhaust even more the one who tries to accompany her and crashes again and again against insuperable barriers" (*AC* 30).[201] Though the trip down the autoroute provided relief and escape, the pain returns at the novel's end. While Cortázar cannot recreate the experience of the trip, by writing it he may perhaps taste some of the same joy one more time, as the reader does as well.

Playing by the Rules: Ludics and Freedom

I shall now return to the text's playfulness that resonates despite its sorrow in order to show that the rules the couple sets (arbitrarily, as nearly all rules are) allow the unrestricted joy they so clearly experience throughout their thirty-three days as autonauts. By creating an arbitrary system of constraints for themselves, Cortázar and Dunlop also created the possibility for a degree of freedom within that system. Play is defined by both freedom and adherence to rules—a combination that the writers of the Oulipo (L'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) know well, and one that sparked wonderfully imaginative works by creating a new sense of liberty within unconventional confines.[202] In *Los autonautas*, the stakes of the game seem inconsequential until the reader knows the story's end; indeed, beyond routine travel risks, the most likely danger of their trip is utter boredom. However, once Cortázar makes it known that Dunlop died so soon after the journey, the stakes become incredibly high, for the narrative and the trip both seem to have the ability to allow her to live on in some way. This game allows the two of them to trump death, at least temporarily, by creating the impression of existing outside the standard confines of time and space.

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[201] "si esos viajes al país de las tinieblas fatigan al viajero, aún más agotan a aquel que se esfuerza por acompañarlo y que se estrella una y otra vez contra barreras insuperables" (*AC* 26).
[202] For more on this, see Motte, *Playtexts*.

Cortázar and Dunlop's work not only demonstrates the playful nature of their trip, but also implicates the reader in a game that involves the reader, the writers, and the text. As Motte notes, the process of game-playing is not merely a desire to escape from the supposedly serious world; on the contrary, ludism is an integral part of every creative act. He notes that "play is not escapist, nor sterile, nor useless, but, on the contrary, necessarily and fundamentally creative" (*Playtexts* 15). The consequences of such a proposition are vast; instead of renouncing the game as infantile and empty, a reader can allow herself to enter into the work of game-playing knowing that in doing so, she participates in the creation of the work. In fact, Motte recognizes that every work of art is the result of a certain amount of play, whether the process is explicitly recognized or not: "the aesthetic artifact is constructed through a process that is ludic in nature. Here, the creative character of play must be seen as dynamic, interactive, innovative, and (most important) combinatory" (*Playtexts* 16). If the book is an act of play, then the reader can contribute to the narrative through the act of reading and interpreting.

Cortázar and Dunlop point out the fact that in childhood games, it is important not to break the frame of the experience by pointing out the arbitrariness of the rules. "Seen from childhood (or at least going back there in memory) when playing was an obligation, the rules that determined everything since time immemorial, and if you dared to point out that someone had taken it upon themselves to *invent them* . . . watch out, subversive child!" (*AC* 59).[203] They, on the other hand, are quick to point out all of the deliberate decisions they make that will shape their road-bound existence for the next month. Defining the rules is a joyful experience, perhaps because the two suspect that it is precisely by creating rules that ostensibly limit them that they will create the greatest sense of freedom. As they say, "with a jubilation that might seem

[203] "Vistas desde la altura de la infancia (o al menos vueltas a ver en el recuerdo de esa altura) en la que jugar es una obligación, las reglas que todo lo determinaban parecían existir desde tiempos inmemoriales, y si uno se aventuraba a hacer notar que alguien había tomado a su cargo el *inventarlas*… ¡atención, niño subversivo!" (*AC* 53).

exaggerated to the unwarned reader, we began to make up the rules of the game" (*AC* 31). They later make direct note of their freedom: "For us, Parkingland is a world of liberty. [. . .] The conduct of the Parkinglandians (I mean the freewayistas who spend their days or nights in the rest areas) does nothing but multiply this feeling of liberty, because it must be said, alas, that the poor things proceed in a way that, while hesitating to pour scorn on anyone, can only be classified as idiotic" (*AC* 126).[204] Despite the fact that Cortázar and Dunlop have only just set their rules into motion, and previously would have sped along the highway like the rest of the "Parkinglandians," the implementation of the rules creates a sense of belonging within their twosome (plus a few trusted friends), and elitism in relation to those outside of the game—that is, nearly everyone else.

Because the rules were self-imposed, and because nobody else is taking part in the game or enforcing its guidelines, breaking those rules would seem to be an enormous temptation. Rather than being enforced externally, though, the rules that guide Cortázar and Dunlop are far more powerful for being enforced by themselves alone, and for the sole purpose of their joy and liberty. Though they do interpret the rules rather loosely at times (fleeing one dismal rest area for self-defense in the face of highway workers whose behavior was "beginning to put the expedition in serious danger," for example [*AC* 196]),[205] for the most part they do not cut corners. When they begin mapping their daily plans, for instance, they note that "at that stage of the plan it would have been easy for us to invent other rules with the object of eliminating [undesirable rest stops] from our route. But [. . .] we must embark on the autoroute with our

[204] "Para nosotros Parkinglandia es una tierra de libertad. [. . .] La conducta de los parkinglandeses (quiero decir los autopistenses que perdiurnan o pernoctan en los paraderos) no hace sino multiplicar ese sentimiento de libertad, porque preciso es decir, ay, que los pobres proceden de una manera que sin menospreciar a nadie tendemos a calificar de idiota" (*AC* 109).
[205] "empieza a poner seriamente a poner seriamente en peligro la expedición" (*AC* 170).

explorers' eyes as eager to survey its evils as its charms" (*AC* 33).[206] They put on airs of taking their journey incredibly seriously, as children often do, but their self-awareness creates a glint of irony beneath their mock-serious attempts to chronicle their trip. They note the importance of "scientific observations," "without which said book would lack seriousness; and on the other hand would be in a certain way a parallel book, which we would write following the rules of a game of chance, the methods of which were yet to be established" (*AC* 32).[207] Their manner of speaking about play highlights some of the characteristics of play itself, notably the juxtaposition of limitation and freedom.

Still, play and arbitrariness have darker sides to them as well. As they note, for a child, "Entering into the game [. . .] was perhaps the least painful apprenticeship of that loss of liberty we associate (uselessly?) with growing up, 'living in society' where rules are no less arbitrary [. . .] than those of hopscotch" (*AC* 59).[208] While rules can allow for creativity and freedom, they can also constrict in a harmful way. At some point rules cease to form a system of exceptions that exists on the margins of society's norms and becomes the norm itself, and this shift seems to undermine the essential component of freedom. Perhaps part of this is because both the decision to enter the game and the decision to leave it are arbitrary, allowing one the possibility of removing oneself from the system at any given time, whereas society's rules offer no such release.

The freeway is not a straight line but a spiral, our two lives also spirals, and the

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[206] "a esa altura del plan nos hubiera sido fácil inventar otras reglas con el objeto de eliminarlas de nuestro trayecto. Pero [. . .] debíamos lanzarnos a la autopista con nuestros ojos de exploradores tan prontos a sondear lo que tuviera de malo como de bueno" (*AC* 29).

[207] "elementos científicos;" "sin las cuales dicho libro no tendría un aire serio; y por otro lado contendría un libro en cierto modo paralelo, que escribiríamos siguiendo las reglas de un juego de azar cuyas modalidades quedaban por establecer" (*AC* 28).

[208] "Entrar en el juego [. . .] era quizá el aprendizaje menos doloroso de esa pérdida de libertad que asociamos (¿inútilmente?) al hecho de crecer, de 'vivir en sociedad' donde las reglas son no menos arbitrarias [. . .] que las de la rayuela" (*AC* 53).

> vertigo of those lines that cross, in the mosaic of the circles and tangents, parallel and intersecting; and only an arbitrary decision—we took it before going down this path, without worrying about its importance—will make us leave one day (happily still distant) the game and the space that defines it. (*AC* 253)[209]

While games have rules, they create a sense of liberty because they exist outside of other societal boundaries. Though both society and games have unspoken, assumed rules, the systems themselves are of different natures. The game may not always be a happy one: for instance, the freeway world suddenly appears sinister when the couple imagines a playground and traffic cones as torture devices and a graveyard for witches (*AC* 319 and following). Still, even this dark vision of their surroundings bears no real menace, as it exists within the realm of the game and not that of reality.

While playing is natural and expected for children, Cortázar and Dunlop hint that their own games provoke accusations of insanity from their peers. While they are careful to rely only on those that understand their penchant for play when it comes to renewing their supply of food and conversation, they do not shun those that think them crazy. On the contrary, they relish the slight marginalization. As they say, "the more people used the word madness when they found out about our project, the more beauty they gave to it" (*AC* 120).[210] The delight they take implies that play is unexpected in the adult world, and that the more jarring it seems, the more genuine and childlike the game is (despite the fact that they create the game in a highly self-aware—and thus un-childlike—manner). In reference to this association, Motte suggests a helpful clarification: "Both madmen and idiots, it should be noted, experience and interpret reality in

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[209] "La autopista no es una línea recta sino una espiral, nuestras dos vidas también espirales, y el vértigo de esas líneas que se cruzan, en el mosaico de los círculos y tangentes, paralelas e intersecciones; y sólo una decisión arbitraria—la hemos tomado antes de intentarnos por este camino, sin preocuparnos por su importancia—nos hará salir un día (felizmente todavía lejano) del juego y del espacio que las definen" (*AC* 219).

[210] "los que más usaron la palabra locura cuando se enteraron de nuestro proyecto, más belleza le dieron" (*AC* 104).

ways quite different from those of normal folk; and cultural mythology is rife with examples where the tortured complexity of the one or the astonishing simplicity of the other afford a more lucid grasp of things than most people can claim" (*EO* 83). Game-playing, then, is both a departure from an accepted system, and a way of seeing that system more clearly.

An essential component of the playfulness in Cortázar and Dunlop's text is the elevation of the mundane to the epic. Motte focuses on this in "Everyday Odysseys," highlighting especially the creating of meaning through the juxtaposition. He rightly notes that "one of the defining characteristics of *Les autonautes de la cosmoroute* is the way in which the ordinary and the extraordinary insistently question each other" (*EO* 83). Because their project seems so utterly uninteresting on the surface—what could be less enjoyable than a vacation consisting of nothing but highway rest stops?—it allows Cortázar and Dunlop to explore ways of finding meaning and beauty where they do not expect it. As a result, they suggest the possibility that all mundane acts could hide such wonders as those that they created or discovered on the autoroute. Motte describes this movement as the transformational nature of play itself: "Meaning arises through play, then, in the process of transformation that play enables" (*EO* 85). Play is serious in its implications; it is an escape, but not merely so. By encouraging its participants to reconsider the mundane aspects of life through a new lens, the game Cortázar and Dunlop play has the potential to color their perception of many other elements of daily life.

Cortázar's decision not to alter the playful tone even after Dunlop's death indicates that the approach was not only an appropriate way to communicate their unusual experiences, but also an effective means of dealing with loss. While Cortázar's tone becomes mournful at the end of the journey, and hints of loss pepper the text, the majority of the text is light. Engaging with lost indirectly, through the lenses of play and memory, may be a more effective and natural way

of approaching his loss than a direct elegy would be. The recollection of the journey allows Cortázar to explore the nature of time, space, love, and loss in a way that allows for ambiguity and complexity.

Absence, Mourning, and Playful Creation in the Work of Macedonio Fernández

Like the work of Cortázar and Dunlop, *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* relies on a playful style and unusual premise to explore weighty ideas, particularly the relationship between love and death. The book's ludic style enables a flawless encounter between fiction and theory to take place, delighting the reader while exploring the act of literary creation and the limits of such creation. By approaching formalistic conventions of the novel as one would approach a challenge or a game, Macedonio undertakes a rigorous but playful questioning of novelistic conventions and assumptions. Part of his playfulness involves dancing around limits of the text in a way that can be understood through a Derridean reading as testing the borders of the work itself, differentiating the elements that are necessary to the text from those that are mere ornament. Going one step further, Macedonio also examines whether those seemingly ornamental pieces may be essential to the text, similar to the way that Derrida describes a frame as something both outside of the work and necessary to it in "Parergon" (in *La vérité en peinture*). In Macedonio's work, the things which should be central to a novel according to standard conventions are eliminated, and that which seems ornamental becomes the new essential point of departure. But does this movement simply establish a new set of center/periphery relationships, as is often the case with the transgression of binary oppositions? Macedonio avoids this trap by allowing the novel to begin from a non-foundation—that of absence—as the mourning for the loss of the Eterna sets the creative work into motion.

Museo de la Novela de la Eterna consists of more than sixty prologues, followed by a novel of twenty chapters. While the protracted prologue format of Macedonio's novel may unsettle the reader, the form also helps draw attention to the content, in which absence is fertile ground for creativity. Indeed, absence and mourning create a need for the formalist experimentation in the work, for writing within the bounds of standard expectation would be inadequate. The need for absence exists on many different levels within linguistic and relational schema, stemming first of all from the unbridgeable difference between a word and its meaning. This linguistic gap occurs not only in figurative language, where a word is deliberately used to mean something other than its standard definition, but truly in any form of language, as a word cannot cease to be figurative in that it always functions as a referent to something that the word itself (as word) is not. Though absence may be impossible to bridge, acts of creativity and communication exist because of an effort to move toward overcoming that gap. By harnessing an absence and converting mourning into fruitfulness, Macedonio conscientiously works within the framework that allows language itself to function.

Mourning, Absence, and Plurality

An act of mourning implies recognition of loss, as such recognition is an essential beginning point to emotional processing. Macedonio's work is precisely such an act of mourning: a creative process borne out of pain and loss and the effort to work through it. The loss is double: not only does Macedonio's work voice a lament for the loss of the Eterna, it simultaneously may be seen as a work that creatively and productively mourns the absence that is fundamental to language itself. The work comes into existence because of both of these absences, that of the Eterna, and that of the connection between a word and its meaning. It is only because of this semantic gap that literature can exist; it is only because of the loss of the Eterna that Macedonio's work takes form.

The paradox of mourning as both devastating loss and creative impetus can perhaps be seen most clearly in Macedonio's poetry. Even the title of the first part of his collection, *Muerte es beldad* ("Death is Beauty"), and the titles of the works within it, most famously "Elena Bellamuerte" ("Elena of the Beautiful Death," as Edith Grossman translates it), imply the tense and uneasy relationship the author endures with the death of Elena. In this poem, Macedonio's reaction to death ranges from denial of its very possibility to acceptance of its incongruent beauty. He first seems unable to reconcile the possibility of death entering into a relationship so filled by love, as here when he addresses death:

> For I have seen how you paused in your icy flight
> when you came to rest on the heart of that loving child
> and how you quickly flew off again
> in deference to so much sweetness, because love ruled in her,
> because love was her defense

against Death. ("Elena of the Beautiful Death" 101, trans. Grossman throughout)[211]

For Macedonio at this point in the poem, love and death are irreconcilable; he cannot conceive of their simultaneous existence. Nonetheless, the poem seems to be an act of mourning that allows Macedonio to experience emotions in a different way, so that instead of coming to a point of frustration because of the incompatibility of expectation and reality, he finds—through the creative process and his own poetic voice—a means of understanding and accepting the seeming paradox. From initial denial and disbelief, the author moves into an imaginary response from his beloved, in which she seems to encourage his acceptance:

And her smile at that hour
said to me: 'Let me play, let me smile,
this terror is only for a moment.
As I leave I take
your understanding of me,
and I know
that foolish mortal love
will be yours no longer. ("Elena of the Beautiful Death" 102-103) [212]

By imagining the words of his beloved imploring him to accept her new state of being, Macedonio comes to a sense that her death is no longer something unfathomable and inconsistent with his understanding of reality. Instead, though the possible falseness of her death still plagues

[211] "Si he visto cómo echaste / La caída de tu vuelo ¡tan frío! / A posarse al corazón de la amorosa / Y cual lo alzaste al pronto / De tanta dulzura en cortesía / Porque amor la regía / Porque amor defendía / De muerte allí" ("Elena Bellamuerte" 26).
[212] "Y me decía / Su sonreír en hora tanta: / 'Déjame jugar, sonreír. Es un instante / En que tu ser se azore. / Llévome de partida / Tu comprenderme. Voyme entendida, / Torpeza de amor de hombre ya no será de ti'" ("Elena Bellamuerte" 27).

his thoughts as evidenced by repetition of words such as "*fingir*" and "*dormir*," he nevertheless begins to associate death with beauty:

> I knew about Death but not that parting, no.
> Death is beauty and she, full of wisdom, left me—
> her child's game the game of a child
> who has faced smiling Death—
> her inventive mind
> torn by the stratagems of so much love. ("Elena of the Beautiful Death" 103)[213]

Through the image of a smile and a child's game, artifice, beauty, and play all become linked to death as Macedonio grapples with his own process of mourning. These ideas (artifice, beauty, and play) are explicitly present in Macedonio's poetry as thematic elements, and will become the internal structural and formal forces of *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*.

Macedonio continues to explore the reality of death in "Otra vez," ("Once Again") as he addresses Death directly, speculating "You are Nothing and not Nothingness" (61, my translation throughout).[214] Perhaps this is the paradox of death and creation: to be simultaneously nothing and not nothing, to be at the same time emptiness and the possibility of non-emptiness. This paradox is crucial, as it is at the heart of his creative process; absence takes on a strange foundational nature as it both exemplifies nothingness and creates the very possibility for meaning. As Macedonio's poetry continues to revisit ideas of death and beauty, his reflections gain force and take on a progressively more definite shape, thus solidifying both the centrality of mourning in his work as well as the possibility for unification of paradoxical elements:

> Death is Beauty. Only of love is Death and is the Beauty of

[213] "Yo sabía muerte pero aquel partir no. / Muerte es beldad y me quedó aprendida / Por juego de niña que a sonreída muerte / Echó la cabeza inventora / Por ingenios de amor mucho luchada" ("Elena Bellamuerte" 28).
[214] "Nada eres y no la Nada."

> Love. This is what the beloved taught me, the girl who was wise
> for having gone through more love, for troubling my love with death,
> testing it with absence and waiting. ("Otra vez" 62)[215]

Rather than envisioning the relationship between death and love as one of impossibility, at this point Macedonio conceives of an identity between them, perhaps through the link of beauty. Idelber Avelar notes the great extent to which the process of mourning is crucial in Macedonio's work: "There is no doubt, however, that Macedonio's mourning for Elena is the motor power generating the stories. Here it has to do with the furtive figure of origin as loss" (Avelar 426, my translation).[216] Having come to understand death in a different way through writing, Macedonio has opened up the possibility for continuing to tap that creative impulse that unites death and love and beauty; the product will be the years-long project of the *Museo*.

Mourning is clearly an essential force in Macedonio's work, but in order to go a step further and name it the foundation or creative initiative of his novelistic project, it will be useful to consider the ways in which death and absence figure into the work of Maurice Blanchot, whose ideas I have also examined in previous chapters. In particular, Blanchot's *L'arrêt de mort* and *L'entretien infini* provide further insight into possible reasons that mourning acts as such a productive force in Macedonio. One key element in this line of reasoning is the understanding of death not only as limitation—the outermost boundary on individual life—but also as aperture. Death in *L'arrêt de mort* takes on its most interesting figuration at the end of the novel, as Blanchot constructs a complex understanding involving eternal position and movement:

> I have loved it and I have loved only it [*elle*], and everything that happened I

[215] "Muerte es Beldad. Sólo de amor es Muerte y es la Beldad de / Amor. Cual me lo hizo aprendido la Amorosa, la sabia niña / por haber más amor ida, por inquietar de muerte mi amor, / probándolo de ausencia y de espera."
[216] "No hay duda, empero, de que el duelo de Macedonio por la muerte de Elena es la fuerza motriz generadora de relatos. Se trata aquí de la figura furtiva del origen como pérdida."

> wanted to happen, [. . .] I gave it all my strength and it gave me all its strength, so that this strength is too great, it is incapable of being ruined by anything, and condemns us, perhaps, to immeasurable unhappiness, but if that is so, I take this unhappiness on myself and I am immeasurably glad of it and to that thought I saw eternally, "Come," and eternally it [*elle*] is there. (80, trans. Lydia Davis)[217]

The feminine pronoun "la" is ambiguous throughout this passage, having for possible antecedents a particular woman, thought, or perhaps even death. But most interesting is the notion of infinite paradox that enters at several points: immeasurable unhappiness that results in immeasurable rejoicing, for instance. This paradox is also present in the eternal speaking of the command "come" which is followed by the statement that she or it is eternally "there." The complication of this passage occurs because of the positioning and movement implied between speaker and interlocutor: in order to command someone to come, a certain separation between the two must be assumed in order for the command to be logical. If the person obeys, then the next assumption is that the distance will diminish. By eternally commanding the other to come, both perpetual distance and perpetual reduction of distance occur simultaneously. This is further complicated by the statement that she/it is eternally already there, as in this case distance, diminishing distance, and presence all coexist concurrently and eternally. All of these complexities highlight the richly strange set of assumptions that may come into being when a problematic notion such as absence becomes foundational, as here it is that absence between subject and object that creates the possibility for movement and arrival. Additionally, as I have suggested in earlier chapters, Blanchot argues in *L'entretien infini* that any communication or

[217] "Je l'ai aimée et je n'ai aimé qu'elle, et tout ce qui est arrivé, je l'ai voulu, [. . .] je lui ai donné toute ma force et elle m'a donné toute la sienne, de sorte que cette force trop grande, incapable d'être ruinée par rien, nous voue peut-être à un malheur sans mesure, mais, si cela est, ce malheur je le prends sur moi et je m'en réjouis sans mesure et, à elle, je dis éternellement : 'Viens,' et éternellement, elle est là" (Blanchot *Arrêt* 127).
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relationship requires interruption and alterity; just as a separation creates the possibility for approach, death and mourning establish the possibility for renewal and creation.

Macedonio's work shows one possibility for entering into the creative process in a way that keeps death, plurality, or difference always at the forefront in a way that is similar to the Blanchot's, as described above. The understanding of death is perhaps more positive if one considers the implied movement towards renewal, and is also more complex. Nélida Salvador has nevertheless characterized the absence of Elena as simple: "death, stripped of its traditional consequences, appears as a transitory concealment, simple absence that contributes to intensifying the fullness of love with insistent hope of a new encounter" (Salvador 66, my translation throughout).[218] While I agree with Salvador that death functions as a catalyst that augments the experience of love for Macedonio, I do not think that the absence can be characterized as "simple." On the contrary, absence for Macedonio seems richly complex, as seen in the emotions evoked by his poetry; impossibility, love, beauty, play, artifice are all incorporated into the notions of death and absence. Similarly, Salvador understands Macedonio's work as a negation of reality, a concept which I find problematic. She sees his novelistic project as a "negation of reality, [that] far from precipitating it into nothingness, frees it from its contingencies to submerge it in an eternal present where being and non-being equip themselves in a limitless passing in whose immutability death has no jurisdiction" (Salvador 105).[219] While the results she notes are certainly true, the eternal present and limitlessness that she finds in Macedonio's work seem to me to stem ultimately from an acceptance of reality that enables him to understand it in a new way. Only by this acceptance is his concept of reality freed from

[218] "la muerte, despojada de sus connotaciones tradicionales, aparece como un ocultamiento transitorio, simple ausencia que contribuye a intensificar la plenitud del amor con la ahincada esperanza de un reencuentro."
[219] "negación de la realidad, [que] lejos de precipitarlo en la nada lo libera de sus contingencias al sumergirlo en un presente eterno donde ser y no-ser se equiparan en un transcurrir sin limites en cuya inmutabilidad no tiene jurisdicción la muerte."

constraints and opened up to playfulness and creativity. Macedonio does not simply deny the possibility of death; instead, he comes to understand death as a place of opening, not a closing, as in the eternal "viens" of Blanchot.

Limits, Ludics, and Prologues

As the process of mourning generates an impetus for the creative process, Macedonio shifts from sorrow to playfulness. Perhaps because so much of his writing initiates in the understanding of limits, both their rigidity and fluidity, between life and death, the form of his work also undertakes a fascinating exploration of the limits of the work of art. Because of the unusual form of his novel which incorporates more than sixty prologues and metafictional reflections within the fiction itself, an exploration of the work as seen through the theoretical lens of Derrida's "Parergon" (in *L'écriture et la différence*) facilitates a particularly interesting reading of Macedonio's project. Starting from a basis of Kant's ideas in the *Critique of Judgment* regarding the relationship of a work of art to its frame or other ornamentation, Derrida explores the nature of the framing element and how it affects the work of which it both is and is not a part. Much of his thought involves the problematic nature of limitation and definition, as it is often difficult to delineate the precise parameters of a work of art. Macedonio's novel, when considered through the paradigm of Derrida's work, underscores the arbitrary nature of limitations by subverting the reader's expectations of what does and does not constitute the primary material of the work. Both by his use of myriad prologues and by the unusual ways in which the book gained circulation even before publication, Macedonio challenges the ways in which readers define his work.

According to Derrida's reading of Kant, aesthetic judgment hinges on the relationship of

the subject to the work of art, and this relationship requires the subject to be able to differentiate the work from that which is not the work. This ability becomes complicated by the presence of ornamentation, parerga, which are simultaneously part of the work and external to it. "A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done, the fact, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er)" (*W&D* 54, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod throughout).[220] The "parergon" is necessary to the work and yet not part of it. Part of the complexity of Derrida's discussion stems from the fact that any attempt to define something as both substantive and non-substantive creates challenges for linguistic precision. Still, this place of tension is where Derrida concentrates his focus, for if this space is impossible to define or comprehend, then the viewer arguably cannot approach or judge the work of art. As Derrida observes, any discussion of the beauty of a work of art "presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of the art object, here a *discourse on the frame*" (*W&D* 45).[221] Because this ability to define is crucial to the ability to judge, the unresolved interiority-exteriority of the parergon is decidedly problematic to any analysis of a work of art. Macedonio's novel undertakes a discourse of the frame, challenging the reader's ability to define the meaning or beauty of the piece by subverting the possibility of delineating clearly between that which is and that which is not part of the work.

Simultaneously undertaking a project of exploring the field of fiction and creating a work within that field, the novel falls in a liminal space between fiction and theory, in which neither

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[220] "Un parergon vient contre, à côté et en plus de l'*ergon*, du travail fait, du fait, de l'oeuvre mais il ne tombe pas à côté, il touche et coopère, depuis un certain dehors, au-dedans de l'opération. Ni simplement dehors ne simplement dedans. Comme un accessoire qu'on est obligé d'accueillir au bord, à bord. Il est d'abord l'à-bord" (*ED* 63).
[221] "présuppose un discours sur la limite entre le dedans et le dehors de l'objet d'art, ici un *discours sur le cadre*" (*ED* 53).

domain can claim exclusive rights to the finished product. In fact, even the idea that the work can be considered a finished product is questionable, as the only limit that put an end to the continued weaving of ideas was the death of the author, after which the work—which represented over twenty-five years of thought and development—was finally published posthumously. Macedonio's work hints at a preoccupation with a certain development of thought, rather than an attempt to fix or pin down one finished product. In this notion, the concept of limits on a work of literature are already coming into question: a reader can now pick up Macedonio's novel as a single, cohesive, bound book, but he never in his lifetime saw it produced in that way.

A glance at the table of contents is enough to disorient a reader's expectations, as Macedonio deliberately and playfully disregards the standard format of a published novel. It is impossible for the reader to casually flip past introductory material to get to the meat of the novel, for in the place of a predictably negligible prologue is instead an entire sea of prologues (sixty-three of them), nearly submerging the slim pages that contain the supposed "real" novel. The reader is obliged to approach the work cautiously, guardedly, realizing from the outset that a habitual posture will be inadequate as even ideas of what constitutes a novel are shuffled into unfamiliarity. Macedonio's work presents itself both as a novel and as a thorough questioning of novelistic conventions and presuppositions. The numerous prologues examine, introduce, suggest, evoke, and question the novel-to-come for well over a hundred pages before the reader can actually approach the fiction. The thought of skipping these prologues, as one so easily skips them in many works, is unthinkable here, as the sheer number of pages devoted to them suggests their importance. The prologues could be considered parerga, and yet they are essential to the work as a whole, causing the reader to have difficulty defining what is and is not part of the

novel. Indeed, some of Macedonio's most creative and innovative work takes place in these preliminary pages. One result is that the text itself is both supported and undermined by these incessant pre-beginnings; the fiction is fragmented by the bulk and potency of the material that introduces it. Unlike most works of fiction, the supposedly secondary material is actually primary in Macedonio's work.

To a great extent, Macedonio's undertaking involves the question of limits, borders, and definitions. Macedonio boldly proclaims that he will be writing "the first good novel," or perhaps "the last bad novel," or even "a forthcoming goodbad novel, firstlast in its genre."[222] By placing the opposite pairs of good/bad and first/last in such close proximity to each other through neologisms, the boundaries between them blur. In any event, what is certain from the very beginning is that Macedonio takes a ludic stance in relation to the process of writing, constantly exploring it from a playfully self-aware standpoint. Referring back to the good-bad novels, Macedonio proposes that "it's up to the reader to collaborate and sort out the confusion" (*Museum* 5).[223] His invitation turns out to be quite serious, as the reader will take on a variety of unexpected roles in the novel's course, gradually realizing that Macedonio is indeed not the only writer involved in the creation of what may be the first good novel: the implied reader will also act as a constant co-author in the work.

As another preliminary gesture, before the prologues begin, Macedonio dedicates his work to la Eterna, whose role—that of absence and creative impetus—closely resembles that of Elena in Macedonio's poetry. La Eterna appears as the inspiration for the work, and yet as with Elena, it is actually her absence that will serve as the guiding force of the novel. In introducing la Eterna, Macedonio also introduces a variety of grandiose buzzwords, all capitalized to highlight

[222] *The Museum of Eterna's Novel,* Trans. Margaret Schwartz throughout; 5-6. "la primera novela buena," "la última novela mala," "una próxima novela malabuena, primerúltima en su género" (*Museo* 137-38).
[223] "el lector colabore y las desconfunda" (*Museo* 137).

their (impossible) status as transcendent areas to explore: "Reality," "the I," "Individual," "World," "Mercy," "Other," "Itself," and "What Is" (*Museum* 3).[224] Any of these terms alone could spark a mountain of intellectual discourse, and yet, because the melancholy of la Eterna's absence will prove to be a stronger motivation than her presence, Macedonio seems to be setting the lofty, capitalized ideas up as those things which will be known only by their absence. It may be because of the oxymoronic concept of a central absence that ludism is the most effective approach for Macedonio: playfulness is an excellent way to bring to the forefront the strange, incongruent elements that the novel contains, as it allows these elements to be simultaneously strange and expected.

The possibility of a paradoxical starting point for the novel also initiates a complex examination as to the positions of center and periphery. Absence seems to be central, and yet it cannot truly be anything; the peripheral material of prologues takes precedence over the central body of fiction. What has Macedonio actually done with these positions? It is simple to say that center and periphery have switched places, and yet this is a problematic move because it does nothing more than create a new center rather than truly questioning the positions. Rather than negating, each element simply becomes its other. And yet, ideas of self and other are part of the central absence of the work, which complicates such a clearly definable changing of positions. Instead of this simple dialectical move that re-creates standard divisions, Macedonio's work evaluates the nature of the idea of positioning. The periphery is not a new center, but neither is it peripheral. Macedonio plays in a similar way with the tendencies of "readers who skip around in the book" and "complete readers" in the prologue called "For readers who will perish if they

[224] "Realidad," "Yo," "Persona," "Mundo," "Piedad, " "Otro," "Nosotros," and "Haber Algo" (*Museo* 135).

don't know what the novel is about" (*Museum* 22).[225] In this case, Macedonio, by himself becoming a "disorderly author," negates something for each reader, prohibiting each from reading in their habitual way. The disorderly will be jarred by the experience of "such a trench-riddled book the disorderly reader had no other recourse than to read in order, so as to maintain the disorder of the text, since the book was out of order before" (*Museum* 22).[226] The result will be that the reader will have become "an orderly reader thanks to a work full of prefaces and such vague titles that you have finally been trapped by the unexpected continuity of your reading" (*Museum* 23).[227] Macedonio has uprooted the reader's ability to claim identity through a way of reading, because the form of the novel subverts that method and overturns the reader's expectations.

The fluidity of positions is essential to the concepts of implied readerly and writerly roles as well. Reader and writer change positions frequently and with ease; the writer comments on the work, which is generally the role of reader, and the reader takes an active role in the text. Unruly characters jump the boundaries of their fictional story, appearing in the frame text of the prologues and attempting to address the implied reader, who is nevertheless still a narrative step away from the true reader. Characters also demand existence outside the boundaries of the pages, complaining to the author, "I want life! I want these upsets and shadows, I want life!" (*Museum*192).[228] At times the novel itself speaks, as in the prologue "Salutation," thus becoming a character or perhaps a writer. Interestingly, when the novel has a chance to speak, it uses its voice to bid the reader farewell in an anticipation of being forgotten: "I'll say goodbye here, too,

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[225] "lector salteado;" "lector seguido;" "A los lectores que padecerían si ignorasen lo que la novela cuenta" (*Museo* 159).
[226] "un libro tan zanjeado que no hubo recurso sino leerlo seguido para mantener desunida la lectura, pues la obra salteaba antes" (*Museo* 160).
[227] "lector seguido gracias a una obra de prefacios y títulos tan sueltos que has sido por fin encuadernado en la continuidad de tu leer" (*Museo* 160).
[228] "¡Yo quiero la vida! ¡Yo quiero estos sobresaltos y tinieblas, yo quiero la vida!" (*Museo* 365).

reader" (*Museum* 45).[229] Other sections claim to be auto-prologues that prologue themselves and call into evidence the strangeness of the act, as in the section titled: "What do you expect: I must keep prologuing" (*Museum* 100).[230] Macedonio artfully juggles the notions of implied reader and writer, characters, novel, and prologue, allowing each at times to play a role it is not meant to play.

By its emphasis on self-reflection, highlighted (or exacerbated) in the self-prologue, the work is clearly heavily metaliterary. As such, it therefore runs the risk of falling into tautology: a work of literature describing a work of literature, nothing more. The challenge of such a project is to explore and question literature in a way that is not banal, but rather that causes the reader to abandon the idea that she knows what a novel is, in order to come to new realizations. The text is combinatorial, experimental; the diction and logic seem to be at odds with each other. The diction makes the text seem expository (in which case it is riddled with contradictions), but in fact the logic reveals more of a performance, experiment, or dialogue (in which case seeming contradictions are actually variations or positional changes).

Comparable to a work of visual abstraction in which images are reduced to their most basic, suggestive elements, Macedonio's novel reduces and condenses, until only the most essential rudimentary conditions remain. Most surprising in this condensation is that characters exist based on their function, rather than their personality: the reader is greeted by such figures as Dulce-Persona (Sweetheart), el Presidente, el No-Existente Caballero (The Gentleman Who Does Not Exist), Quizagenio (Maybegenius), and Eterna. The authorial voice in one prologue worries about the absence of a cook in the story, but assures the reader that this has been taken care of in some manner. Narration does persist despite all the stripping down, but in a fractured

[229] "Adiós, también aquí te diré, lector" (*Museo* 189).
[230] "Qué queréis: debo seguir prólogos" (*Museo* 253).

form, begging the question as to whether or not it is indeed essential. Perhaps the title is revealing of a more appropriate way of categorizing the work: rather than a novel, it may be more accurate to title it a museum of a novel, again highlighting the importance of framing and boundaries as per Derrida. A museum is a place where works are framed and displayed; likewise, in Macedonio's work, the fiction is set apart, framed by prologues, with the thoughts and theory all on display, ready to be contemplated by the reader.

Returning to the necessity of absence and mourning in Macedonio's creative process, Macedonio reveals the insupportable absence creates a need for mourning, and that mourning takes the form of the text. The centrality of the process of mourning and the role of melancholy as creative forces is directly elicited at times. The prologue "Description of Eterna" hints at this relationship of love and melancholy; while the prologue claims to describe la Eterna, she is in fact absent. The prologue instead describes emotions relating to an encounter with her, and creates a strong parallel with the novel itself. "She has tangled tresses, just as my novel does, with which it binds itself to the reader's heart. She's tall, shapely, with black eyes and hair. Eterna cannot be described in any other manner than this: Whoever comes before her loses the power of forgetting" (*Museum* 83).[231] Various other emotions and impressions follow. Interestingly, forgetfulness is described in a positive way in this passage (as *un don*, a gift). This particular fragment transgresses the reader's expectations; it is not a prologue, but a lyric portrayal of the encounter with the Eterna, and also of the reader with the text. The essential, la Eterna, is absent, but the loss is not a stopping point, because there remains the possibility of creative commemoration through mourning. Macedonio thus explores the relationship of death and immortality, of melancholy and survival, for creation is spurred on by loss. Even the title of the

[231] "Con trenzas anudadoras, como ha de ser también mi novela que atará el alma del lector, alta, hermosa de formas, ojos y cabellos negros, la Eterna no se describe de otro modo que así: Quien pasa delante de ella pierde el don de olvido" (*Museo* 232).

first prologue, "What is born and what dies," underscores the tension and resulting proximity between birth and death (*Museum* 5).[232] The space where this tension between loss and creation is what is in question, and is more important than the idea of telling something.

When the long-awaited novel finally makes its appearance, it turns out to have many of the same aesthetic concerns as Macedonio's prologues. The essential action of the novel is the conquest of Buenos Aires for aesthetic purposes. The conquest is in the name of Beauty: "Once Ugliness was eliminated from its history or its streets, once that historic injustice or excess of civic enthusiasm was rectified, the gang war would disappear and Buenos Aires would be forever ruled by Beauty and Mystery" (*Museum* 181).[233] Even within the fictional realm, the authorial voice interrupts the narrative with theoretical reflection: "Perhaps some readers will find the much-vaunted Conquest of Buenos Aires by Beauty and the Mystery to be less than lucid. [. . .] I will satisfy my incredulous and clever reader by confessing that the chapter is simply the work of a dried-up writer, who can do no more" (*Museum* 185, footnote).[234] The Spanish *agotamiento* suggests not just that the writer is "dried-up," but utterly exhausted or depleted. Macedonio (or his implied narratival counterpart) thus confesses that the work is one of exhaustion, and yet out of this emptiness, he is able to create. Again the reader feels the tension between lack and creation, which results here in a sort of aesthetic imperialism.

The novel is replete with parentheses, interjections, interruptions, and fragments. The genre is inconsistent (lapsing occasionally into theory), the characters want to leave their fictional realm to emerge into "reality," the reader acts in an opposite way and enters the fiction,

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[232] "Lo que nace y lo que muere" (*Museo* 137).
[233] "Extirpada la Fealdad en su historia o en sus calles, reparada alguna injusticia histórica o demasía del entusiasmo ciudadano, la lucha entre ambos bandos desaparecería y Buenos Aires quedaría eternamente conquistada para la Belleza y el Misterio" (*Museo* 352).
[234] "Quizás alguno encuentre poco lucida la tan prometida Conquista de Buenos Aires para la Belleza y el Misterio [. . .] A mi incrédulo y listo lector lo satisfaré confesando que el capítulo es simplemente la obra de un autor en agotamiento, que no da más" (*Museo* 357, footnote).

and the author inserts himself as character at each level of the narrative. One comic interchange features an argument between the characters, the reader, the author, and the metaphysical, as they all examine their own supposed roles. The reader here threatens to stop reading: "The characters pain me. But I exist. Is there another chapter wants to live? If there is I'm not reading anymore; there's no spectacle so uncomfortable" (*Museum* 188).[235] The author revels in his power and laments his failure: " I have the power to create appearances and death, to reign over all of this and yet there's someone on the earth whose soul wants to be sounded—and I can't do it!" (*Museum* 188).[236] At such moments, the fiction appears to more closely resemble the preceding prologues than something somehow different and complete unto itself. Even once the novel begins, Macedonio's work of theory and metaliterature continues to assert itself strongly, making self-reflection appear as the unifying factor through all parts of the museum of the novel.

Macedonio's work uses the novelistic form to explore that very form, and more precisely, to explore the limits of that form, making it legitimate to engage in a reading of it through the paradigm of Derrida's "Parergon." The work begins long before the novel actually appears and continues after it ends, calling into question the notions of boundary, beginning, and end. This questioning, prominent in the text and paratext, actually extends much further as well: Macedonio's work on the novel lasted for many years, and its influence was far reaching, both through its printed version and through conversations about its ideas. Starting from an improbable foundation of absence and mourning, Macedonio turns toward formalist playfulness as a means of coming to terms with seemingly contradictory ideas of love, death, and beauty. As with any work of art, the work is more than just the novel; it is also the ideas that create the

[235] "Me apenan los personajes. Pero yo existo. ¿Hay algún otro capítulo de ganas de vivir? Si es así no leo más; no hay otro espectáculo tan incómodo" (*Museo* 360).
[236] "¡Qué poder tengo de crear apariencia y muerte, de regir todo esto y sin embargo hay alguien en la tierra en cuya alma quisiera ser soñado y no lo logro!" (*Museo* 361).

novel. It could also be said, then, that a work extends through all of the various writers and thinkers that it influences, and is therefore limitless. By playing with the boundaries of his own work through the use of multiple prologues and characters that strive for life, Macedonio draws the reader's attention to the artifice and arbitrariness of a work, and especially of the limits imposed on it.

Conclusion

In both *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* and *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*, the authors approach topics of love and loss through playfulness, not so that they may avoid pain, but in order to understand and communicate about it. The lighthearted nature of play allows each writer to express grief indirectly, thereby working around the element of the unsayable that can otherwise silence the mourner. Because game-playing calls central systems and their limits into question, this approach allows the writers to examine the processes of both mourning and writing from a perspective that is neither completely a part of those processes, nor entirely outside of them. Each writer considers the nature of death in relation to love, as well as the similarities between the writer and the mourner, in part by establishing a new and playful system with rules and limits of its own that allows them to perceive ordinary circumstances through an unusual lens.

VI. The Unnamable Outrage of Social Trauma:

Gérard Gavarry and Toni Morrison

Engaging neither with sweeping violence on the scale of the Holocaust, nor with the singular and deeply personal anguish of losing a loved one, works that take on the weight of social trauma or injustice grapple with a vague, more insidious type of trauma. The perpetrators of an oppressive social system are often impossible to pinpoint. Because the entire society participates in the structures that create the trauma, most members of that society contribute to its perpetuation, whether they do so knowingly or not, often through passive complicity. In Gérard Gavarry's *Hop là! un deux trois* (2001) and in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), each author displaces a social crime into another figure, thus demonstrating both the difficulty of defining the problem, and the essential need to do so in order to confront and come to terms with the situation. Gavarry uses a brief notation to refer to the social trauma, dubbing it "CELA" ("THIS")[237] in all capital letters, which names the social trauma while leaving it indefinite. Morrison, on the other hand, displaces the trauma itself into the ghostly character of Beloved, who at once represents the trauma that her mother, Sethe, endured, and also the violent trauma perpetrated by Sethe's own hand.

Social iniquity stirs beneath the surface of *Hop là*, as Gavarry relocates the Book of Judith to the Parisian suburbs. In this story from the Apocrypha, Judith is a beautiful widow from Bethulia, a town about to be conquered. Judith bravely and cunningly seduces Holofernes in order to behead him, inciting the town to rebellion, which enables them to overcome their oppressors. Just as Judith acted with both violence and strategy to rid her people of the oppression of Holofernes, so Ti-Jus casts himself in a sacrificial light as he kills his mother's

[237] In her 2009 translation of *Hoppla!*, Jane Kuntz translates "cela" as "this," and I employ the same term throughout in order to be consistent with her choice. A more accurate selection, however, would be "that."

boss, Madame Fenerolo—another symbol of oppression, albeit in more mundane circumstances. The story is told three times, through three lexical and metaphorical lenses, with each version of the story bearing a title that reflects its language, imagery, and tone. The first is "The Coconut Palm" and includes language of the tropics as well as scientific jargon related to coconut trees; the second, "The Cargo Ship," incorporates nautical language; and the third, "The Centaur," is colored by language related to mythology. Because of the connection with the story of Judith as well as the final events of each retelling of the story, earlier events that seem banal in themselves (driving through traffic, getting a skirt hemmed) take on weightier significance. For instance, in the third segment of the book, "Le Centaure," a minuscule gesture of Madame Fenerolo becomes the symbolic representation of the full scale of systemic social trauma in contemporary Paris. In the absence of a clear enemy, the pervasive trauma has instead been obliquely named, thus providing some reference against which the Judith-like rebellion can take place.

Trauma is similarly displaced and named in *Beloved*, though rather than remaining a vague idea, Morrison incarnates the trauma in the character of Beloved herself. The character is present from the beginning, appearing as a sort of destructive but tolerated poltergeist, but the reader only gradually learns how past events help explain the reasons for her presence and her violence. By clothing the abstract idea of trauma in the flesh of a character whose identity is defined by love and loss, Morrison depicts trauma as being equal and reciprocal to love, thereby suggesting that intense attachment heightens the possibility for deeply painful loss. When Beloved mysteriously appears as a tangible entity rather than an invisible force, she becomes a sort of witness to her own trauma, as evidenced by her insatiable cravings not only for sugar, but also for stories. By asking Sethe to tell her everything, she is acting as a witness, rather than a victim; Sethe is instead the victim, recounting her wounds. Thus, while Beloved was clearly the

victim of a brutal act, the fact that Sethe is the one who must process the trauma implies that it was she who suffered more deeply. The trauma was not simply Beloved's death, but something much broader—it was the brutality of a social structure that compelled Sethe to murder her youngest child rather than let her grow up to face the oppression and indignity that Sethe had endured.

In my examination of these two works, I will explore the particular difficulty of coming to terms with social trauma, where loss cannot be easily localized in a single person or idea. I will analyze the ways in which these novels handle the difficulty of mourning in situations with such broad implications by displacing the ambiguous source of trauma into a more localized concept (as in *Hop là*) or character (as in *Beloved*). While in some respects these two novels function in similar ways, I will also explore the choices made by each author, and how the two instances work differently because of what or whom the writer depicts as the representation of trauma.

Resituating an Ancient Heroine

While the fundamental event of *Hop là!* is a youth living in the Parisian suburbs killing his mother's boss, at the same time the plot takes root in the Book of Judith. The story is adapted to the backdrop of the Paris suburbs. In Gavarry's version, Ti-Jus, a young man from the *banlieue,* engages in a similar act of seduction and murder of his mother's boss, Madame Fenerolo. The story is recounted three times, and each time Gavarry employs a different code which, on first sight, does not seem to bear much relation to the text itself. The first section, "Le cocotier," takes on the jargon of exoticism, beaches and coconut trees; the second, "Le cargo," of movement and ships, ocean and transport; the third, "Le Centaure," of mythology and hybridity.

Gavarry retains the names of people and places, though with some distortion, such as reversing the genders of the protagonist and the antagonist. Thus the heroine Judith becomes the young male Ti-Jus, while the oppressive Holofernes is incarnated in Ti-Jus' mother's boss, Madame Fenerolo. Because of the links to the story of Judith, the theme of oppression and rebellion exerts a powerful force, even when the narrative focus shifts to details that do not directly reinforce the main idea. Indeed, the fragmented mode of storytelling influences the reader's approach to the text in a powerful way. The story is told three times with three different lexicons, each of which presents difficulties of comprehension that cause the reader to think about the function of language, and more particularly of slang. The perspective also shifts slightly from one telling to the next, thus encouraging the reader to consider the significance of the differences, as well as the reason for the story's three tellings. Madame Fenerolo functions as the story's primary perpetrator of class-based societal oppression, and as such she is the focal point of Ti-Jus's assault.

These similarities are clear, and provide a backdrop against which to paint the pronounced differences of time, place, and character, which lead to the telling of an entirely new story. As Warren Motte says in "Gérard Gavarry's Hops," like the Book of Judith, "*Hop là!* also wagers on the notion of a besieged people, though this time the siege is laid not by a foreign power, but by another social class" (66). Of course any modern-day systems of society, of politics, any institutions, any social norms, are radically different from those depicted in the original text of Judith, but the relationships between them retain a similar flavor of oppression. It is precisely this combination of similarity and difference, or rupture, which enables the power of the retelling.

By joining his narrative with one that has been told and retold, Gavarry leaves open the possibility of understanding things in the text that may only be hinted at, but which are developed more fully in the original story of Judith. Notions of injustice and oppression, for instance, take on an unusual tint when transposed from biblical setting to a contemporary Parisian suburb. A retelling necessarily casts both versions in a different light; when something is retold, whether it be through translation, oral storytelling, or a recasting of certain elements, the two versions are inevitably different. Both take on shades of the other; the similarity between them allows them to be juxtaposed and considered together, but their difference is what enables newness and unexpectedness to be found in each.

While Madame Fenerolo is the most tangible representation of oppression, Gavarry emphasizes an intangible aspect of her behavior as that which is at the root of the social trauma. By focusing on "THIS," the moment when Madame Fenerolo brusquely turns off the radio, and extending it into a vague sensation, experienced by the entire suburb, that something is wrong, Gavarry highlights the complexity of social discord when no clear fault can be established.

Madame Fenerolo, who has unleashed "THIS" through her action in the car, remains the focal point of the plot even though the trauma itself is far broader and deeper. I will argue that through his use of fragmented plot lines, jarring lexical choices, and an emphasis on displacement, Gavarry suggests a certain embodiment of social trauma without assigning definite blame.

Tellings and Retellings: Fragmentation in Form and Language

The form of Gavarry's novel plays an especially important role in the complex environment of brutality, submission, and rebellion that he depicts. By retelling the story multiple times and by using language that is unusual and at times obscure, Gavarry fragments the reader's experience in a way that creates a sense of confusion and non-linear progression that echoes the characters' frustrations.

If the novel in its entirety demonstrates multiplicity and rupture through its relationship with the story of Judith, the interior structure also exhibits interruption through its own retelling. Gavarry's creation is that of a triptych, a tripartite telling and retelling of what is essentially the same story. As to the role of these three parts, according to Gavarry, "more than themes, they would be rhetorical tools" that enable the telling and retelling to take place and provide a forum for disparity and proximity.[238] Like a triptych, each panel or section of the story could potentially stand alone, yet it is only in conjunction with the other two parts that the work becomes whole.

Likewise, the fractured structure of the book also brings to mind the visual fracturing of cubism. In cubism, it is impossible for a viewer to assume one continuous perspective; rather, the style suggests a gaze approaching from all perspectives simultaneously. The effect of this multiplicity of perspectives is the creation of something which at first glance may appear shattered, but which upon further reflection provides a nuanced view of our concept of reality

[238] My translation from *FR*, here and throughout. "Plutôt que des thèmes, ils seraient des outils rhétoriques" (*FR* 14).

and the tricks of the visual field. In the narrative at hand, the three parts together contribute to a sense of both fracture and wholeness. Rather than reading a story told from one consistent perspective, in which the reader has a (false) sense of the integrity and wholeness of the work, here the perspective is splintered. Discontinuity, such as may be experienced upon seeing a cubist painting for the first time, becomes the most notable formal element (with one key difference being the temporal aspect of reading that is absent in viewing a painting, and that causes the reader to become aware of fragmentation more slowly). However, through further contemplation, the viewer or reader may realize that by interrupting the supposed perspective, the artist or writer is calling into question the authority of that perspective or the fullness that it can convey, and so provides both means to highlight the question and possible solutions to it. In this sense everything is a potentiality, unresolved, just as the fiction cannot have one true narrator. So here we have the story three times, with three different codes.

Similar to these visual art forms, the triptych and cubist painting, which integrate interruption into their form, *Hop là!* in its triple-telling creates an entirely different aesthetic experience than if the same story were told only once. A sense of possibility, of uncertainty, of multiplicity is fostered by the three accounts with their drastically different lexicons following the same narrative thread to its same violent end. The reader sees something through "Le Centaure" which is not found in "Le cargo;" something in "Le cargo" which was not visible in "Le cocotier". Gavarry reiterates the infinite potentiality of the narrative details when, in the middle of a particular description, he inserts an "ou bien..."[239] and launches an entirely different possibility which nevertheless leaves the plotline intact (*Hop là* 164 for example). Gavarry notes his own criteria for these three parts:

[239]Translated by Kuntz as "Or alternatively…" (*HL* 112).

> 1. *Coconut tree, cargo ship, Centaur*, I gave myself a rule that each panel should be sufficient in itself. The story of Ti-Jus would be told there from end to end, and cut along unchanging lines. 2. A few scenes would repeat themselves in all three panels, some in two of them, and others would be unique…Nonetheless, from one panel to another their duration could be either dilated or contracted, and the narrative accelerations that are the ellipses would not necessarily concern the same moments. 3. Unique scenes or repeated scenes, in any case the text would be entirely new, for each panel would have its own "manner."[240]

Complementarity and continuity in conjunction with variety are thus essential to Gavarry's tripartite construction. He also emphasizes the metaphoricity of each segment as one of the elements of change:

> In terms of the facts the denouement doesn't change from one part of *Hop là! un deux trois* to another. What do change, however, are the modalities of this denouement. The story remains the same, or almost the same, but developed differently, lit differently, and, of course, metaphorized differently. In such a way that the text is completely different each time, and that the series of three panels satisfies the principles of variation and complementarity as well as that of repetition.[241]

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[240] "1. *Cocotier, cargo, Centaure,* chaque volet, me suis-je donné pour règle, devrait se suffire à lui-même. L'histoire de Ti-Jus y serait racontée de bout en bout, et selon un découpage invariable. 2. Quelques scènes se répéteraient dans les trois volets, quelques-unes dans deux d'entre eux, quelques-unes encore seraient uniques...Toutefois, d'un volet à l'autre leur durée pourrait être soit dilatée, soit condensée, et les accélérations narratives que sont les ellipses ne concerneraient pas forcément les mêmes moments. 3. Scènes uniques ou scènes répétées, dans tous les cas le texte serait totalement nouveau, puisque chaque volet allait avoir sa 'façon' propre" (*FR* 113).

[241] "Dans les faits le dénouement ne change pas d'une partie à l'autre de *Hop là ! un deux trois.* Changent, par contre, les modalités de ce dénouement. L'histoire reste la même, ou presque la même, mais autrement développée, autrement éclairée et, bien sûr, autrement métaphorisée. Si bien que le texte est chaque fois totalement différent, et

The effect of this structure is like that of the triptych; the reader perceives a sense of completeness in each element, of uniqueness in each compared to the other two, while simultaneously noting the parallels between each; upon completion of the novel, the three parts layer one over the other to instill sense of fullness in the work as a whole.

Besides the three parts, Gavarry also notes his need to "pierce a few holes in the fiction, by which sudden and far-off exhaust would constitute a fugue towards the realities located outside the field of vision, giving birth in the heart of the text to the sentiment of breadth, of elsewhere, of the unlimited."[242] Thus interruption allows for the entrance of the infinite. He hoped that "of the sublime which I did not know how to give flesh to, the novel would have nonetheless conserved something of the memory, the spirit or the shadow [. . .] haunting the white space between the lines."[243] There is a note of significance in Madame Fenerolo's interrogation of Ti-Jus regarding his torn jeans: "'All those holes,' she said. 'Is that on purpose…? Must get awfully drafty in there! And in this weather too! Aren't you freezing?'".[244] Within the form of the novel, the holes such as those in Ti-Jus's blue jeans are indeed on purpose, and provide an element of life and movement.

Another form of fragmentation more intimate to the details of the novel is that of the encoding of language. The plotline, the structure: both of these elements incorporated a fairly large-scale sort of interruption. The codification, however, plays out in each word of each of the three sections of *Hop là*. Gavarry announces the key to each code at the beginning of each

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que la série des trois volets satisfait aux principes de variation et de complémentarité autant qu'à celui de répétition" (*FR* 58).

[242] "percer dans la fiction quelques brèches, par où de soudaines et lointaines échappées constitueraient autant de fugues vers de réalités situées hors champ, faisant naître au sein même du texte le sentiment de l'ampleur, de l'ailleurs, de l'illimité" (*FR* 127).

[243] "du sublime auquel je n'avais su donner corps le roman ait quand même conservé quelque chose comme la mémoire, l'esprit ou l'ombre [. . .] hantant le blanc des interlignes" (*FR* 128).

[244] Jane Kuntz's translation from *HL*, here and throughout, p. 49. "Ces déchirures, questionna-t-elle, était-ce fait exprès ? … Quels courants d'air ça devait laisser passer ! En cette saison, quel froid !" (*HL* 72).

section—"Le cocotier," "Le cargo," and "Le Centaure"—then allows each to be played out through the narrative voice and through the jargon of the youths. The code is a method of simultaneously masking and revealing. The keys to the code are at the disposition of the reader, and the overall sense of the ideas remains clear through tone and context, but the meanings of the words are deliberately out of reach for a typical reader. This effect was, of course, intended by Gavarry. His criteria were as follows: "A reply formulated in jargon must NOT be translatable into ordinary language. 2. In contrast, the tone or the intention carried by the reply must be clearly intelligible."[245] According to such criteria, he certainly succeeds; the jargon is extraordinarily difficult to decipher word for word, yet the readers as well as the "others" within the fiction can follow the tone and connotation of the dialogues: "And as for the uninitiated, since they know nothing of the jargon they're hearing, they focus their attention on intonation and body language" (*Hoppla* 19).[246] When words fail to reveal their signification, attention turns to meanings found in corporality.

One effect of the code is that of inclusion and exclusion: who understands, and who remains uninitiated? In the narrator-reader relationship, the reader is clearly the uninitiated one, forced either to leave blanks in his or her understanding of the language—thus interrupting the reading through its comprehension—or more literally interrupt his or her reading by flipping between dictionary and novel for each unexpected word. Within the fiction, these in-groups and out-groups can be seen most clearly during the train scenes, in which the young people speak using a slang which leaves fellow riders baffled. This language of Ti-Jus and his friends "is a jargon, or what seems to be a jargon. Comprehensible only to those supposedly initiated, it is

[245] "1. Une réplique formulée en jargon devait N'ÊTRE PAS traduisible en langage ordinaire. 2. Il fallait, en revanche, que soit clairement intelligible l'humeur, ou l'intention dont la réplique était porteuse" (*FR* 35).
[246] "Et quant aux non-initiés, puisqu'ils ignorent tout du jargon qu'ils entendent, ils reportent leur attention sur les intonations des voix, sur les postures et les élans des corps" (*Hop là* 30).

made up of elements that are borrowed, deformed, diverted, disparate while all still having some connection to the coconut tree."[247] Motte notes the effect of exclusion as well: "like any specialized idiom, it serves to create community and to reinforce the identity of the group that speaks it" ("Hops" 69). Interruption, then, serves to communicate a sense of separation more clearly than perhaps a standard description ever could. Those who do not fit in find themselves suddenly uncomfortable and squeezed as in a tight space:

> At present, the other passengers are taking up less room in the compartment. They are also less individualized, bound together now by the fearful hostility they feel toward these unruly youths they're being forced to ride with, having no idea what lunatic notion might now come into their heads, what new stunt they might improvise, whether their next move will be swift, precise, and brutal, or slow, expansive, and awkward. (*Hoppla* 18)[248]

The passengers' inability to understand has created a vision of the young people as unpredictable, as they do not fit within the standard codes already existing in the public's mind.

It is not only the other train passengers who feel this exclusion, however, but the readers as well. The passengers do not understand the language around them, and are troubled by it; the reader is similarly ill at ease. "Without even having to think, the silent witnesses to this vocalizing identify the language they are hearing as French. Nevertheless, certain formulations sound odd to their ears; they can't quite make out certain words, or when they can, these seem to

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[247] "est un jargon, ou un semblant de jargon. Compréhensible seulement à de supposés initiés, elle est faite d'éléments d'emprunt, déformés, détournés, disparates quoique ayant tous quelque rapport avec le cocotier" (*FR* 34).

[248] "Maintenant, les autres passagers tiennent moins de place. Ils sont aussi moins individués, soudés par l'hostilité peureuse que leur inspirent ces garçons tapageurs avec qui ils vont devoir voyager, et dont à aucun moment ils ne sauront quelle idée va les traverser, quelle action ils vont improviser, ni si leur prochain geste sera bref et brutal, ou ample et encombrant" (*Hop là* 29).

make no sense—as in the word *Nucifera* that one of the youths utters in annoyance" (*Hoppla* 18).[249]

Even the idea that the language around them (us) ought to be comprehensible results in fear, simply because they (we) nevertheless cannot decode it. The passengers display this fear in their mannerisms: "The people watched them without reacting, listened without saying a word, cowering in the face of the unpredictable, horrified at recognizing their own language in the argot being spoken, and yet understanding nothing" (*Hoppla* 72).[250] This misunderstanding—or rather, this inability to communicate—results in a view of the youths and the passengers as either super- or sub-human. Ti-Jus and his friends become celestial beings because of their facility with this incomprehensible jargon: "Because they use words like these [. . .] the four adolescents in the Paris-Corbeil look like alien creatures: as foreign as winged angels" (*Hoppla* 19).[251] Still, the description is dehumanizing even if in a supernatural way, denying their relation with humanity. On the other hand, those who do not understand are left as language-less animals:

> But deprived as they are of the crutch of language, reduced to apprehending nothing but physical signals and assigning them meaning based solely on intuition, the passengers of the Paris-Corbeil have been demoted to an animal state, excluded from *Homo loquens*; or, worse, have found themselves compelled

[249] "Sans même avoir à réfléchir, les témoins silencieux de ces vocalises identifient pour du français la langue qu'ils entendent. Néanmoins, certaines formules sonnent bizarrement à leurs oreilles ; certains mots, ils ne les distinguent pas, ou les distinguant ils n'en comprennent pas le sens—comme il en va de ce *Nucifera* que l'un des jeunes gens [. . .] profère avec dépit" (*Hop là* 29-30).

[250] "Les gens les regardaient sans réagir, les écoutaient sans dire un mot, peureux devant l'imprévisible et pétrifiés de reconnaître leur propre langue dans celle-ci, à laquelle ils ne comprenaient rien" (*Hop là* 105).

[251] "Parce qu'ils emploient des mots pareils [. . .] les quatre adolescents font figure, dans le Paris Corbeil, de créatures venues d'ailleurs, aussi étranges que le seraient des anges avec leurs ailes" (*Hop là* 30).

> upon reflection to admit that, when it really comes down to it, the "Talking Animal" itself may be, essentially, at a loss for words. (*Hoppla* 19)[252]

This is an interesting turn, because although it is the group of adolescents who seem violent and dangerous, Gavarry paints those who do not understand as being in a condition of sub-human brutality. By painting Ti-Jus and the others as super-/sub-human in a way that is arguably more complex than the brute condition of those stripped of language, Gavarry creates the youths as hybrid beings, a hybridity which is emphasized in the "Centaure" section. This hybridity is yet another form of interruption, this time within each individual, as multiple identities make up their own whole selfhood.

Additionally, the encoding acts as a medium for reflecting on language itself, its usage, its meaning, and its role in the day-to-day as opposed to in literature. Language functions as a means for rebellion for the marginalized young people; while they lack power within the society, they are able to create systems of inclusion and exclusion through their use of slang. Furthermore, by creating and employing language which, for all those who remain uninitiated, is not meaningful except through extralinguistic elements, Gavarry opens a possibility for reflection on metaphor and literary language, in which meaning is, as a rule, anywhere but in the literal meaning in the words. The tension between understanding and opacity may be a paradox:

> Paradox, without a doubt, but that no less than to my jargon belongs to a number of our gestures, our glances and our daily babblings, belonging even to literature, if by literature one means this territory where language, in playing itself, escapes the usage that one employs everywhere else, and where, event like the point of the

[252] "Mais ainsi privés de l'alibi du langage, réduits à n'appréhender que des signes physiques et à leur donner sens par la seule intuition, les passagers du Paris Corbeil se trouvent comme ramenés à une condition brute, exclus de l'humanité parlante, ou pire, contraints d'éprouver, par un retour sur eux-mêmes, que parlante, après tout, l'espèce ne l'est pas tant que ça" (*Hop là* 31).

> fleeing of reason, it expresses the mystery of sentiments in the same terms that the evidence also proposes.[253]

Motte refers to this tension as one of the many "hops" of Gavarry's work, and one which, by force of interruption, calls into question the language that it interrupts: "The use of the code words is consciously programmatic in character. Those words, in their apparent opaqueness, interrupt the more normative language that surrounds them by force of contrast. In that manner, Gavarry seeks to persuade his reader to reflect upon the uses of language" ("Hops" 70). The reader thus must think about language differently than a work which does not deviate from standard linguistic norms. Here, by contrast, one is left wondering about the use of such bizarre terminology; what do these incomprehensible words communicate that clear language could not?

In addition to questioning language, the reader also questions meaning, as Motte also asserts: "while the coded language Gavarry puts in place is intentionally opaque on the denotative level, its connotative value is intended to be transparent [. . .] Gavarry suggests that meaning may not reside in the places where we habitually look for it; that we must be prepared to hop from one site to another as we search for it" ("Hops" 71). These reflections on language and meaning found in the use of code are perhaps paralleled by language formulas that are so overused they are meaningless. Repeatedly in the novel characters exchange banalities, which Gavarry cleverly suggests could be replaced easily by any other set formula, thus indicating their lack of any real signification:

> These are hardly well-considered choices of words, just some of the usual pat phrases that cross the mind and then slip out whenever they become germane to a

[253] "Paradoxe, sans doute, mais qui non moins qu'à mon jargon est propre à nombre de nos gestes, de nos regards et de nos bredouillements quotidiens, voire propre à la littérature, si par littérature on entend bien ce territoire où la langue en se jouant échappe à l'usage que partout ailleurs on en fait, et où, advenant comme au point de fuite de la raison, elle exprime le mystère des sentiments dans les mêmes termes qui en proposent aussi l'évidence" (*FR* 65).

> conversation in progress. They could easily have been replaced by other such phrases, these commonplaces. [. . .] Their voices, however, the looks on their faces, their faces themselves, the most minute details of their faces—anything about a person that is perceptible from the outside—would nevertheless have registered a significant difference between the two spoken statements: that one meant exactly what its words said, literally, sufficient unto itself; while the other contained a shade of anxious intimacy. (*Hoppla* 12)[254]

As the coded language, it is the connotation of the words (if anything) that matters, not the denotative, despite the clarity of the vocabulary being used.

Each of the above forms of interruption, fragmentation, and multiplicity contributes to the rich formal craft of the novel. By emphasizing discontinuity, Gavarry highlights the lack of logic in the oppressive situation, and also the impossibility of responding to such illogic in a way that clearly isolates and eliminates the oppressive element. The subtle shifts of complicity and exclusion demonstrate the constantly changing social climate that nonetheless continually reinforces the systemic injustice.

Perpetuating a System

Part of the difficulty of writing about social injustice is that even acts of flagrant oppression stem from a long, slow development of a system that allows such injustice to occur. While a particular act may be traumatic and have a clear perpetrator and victim, the damage

[254] "Ce ne sont pas là des paroles longuement pesées, tout juste des formules standard comme il en traverse l'esprit et qu'on lance, pourvu qu'elles aient quelque rapport avec la conversation en cours. Elles auraient pu, ces formules, être remplacées par d'autres [. . .] La voix, le regard, le visage dans ses plus petits détails et tout ce que d'une personne est perceptible depuis l'extérieur n'en auraient pas moins publié la différence des deux discours : que l'un coïncidait avec les mots prononcés, littéralement plein de lui-même ; que l'autre y ajoutait la teneur d'interrogations intimes" (*Hop là* 20-21).

often begins to occur slowly, with small acts of oppression and acquiescence and bitterness that solidify the particular social climate in which the traumatic act occurs. Gavarry depicts this difficulty in *Hop là* by showing the many small ways that oppression manifests itself before Ti-Jus carries out his act of rebellion.

First, Gavarry describes Madame Fenerolo not as a person who is a manager because her job requires it of her, but rather as someone whose existence is innately that of a manager. Depicting her in this way strips Madame Fenerolo of her humanity, or at least of her ability to empathize, for she operates on a different frequency from those around her. When she shows Bessie the hem she would like repaired, revealing her stockings and panties in the process, she does not display the reactions that one might expect.

> However functional and spontaneous it may have been, this exhibition ought to have been a little embarrassing, disturbing, or, if nothing else, should have established that climate of elementary complicity that binds all individuals of the same sex together within the same generic movements and attitudes as they share in some joint activity. This was not the case here. [. . .] No, there was only a manager's gesture—exclusively and totally that, and thus the dazzlingly obvious fact that for Madame Fenerolo, there existed no possible mode of being aside from that of SUMABA manager. (*Hoppla* 14)[255]

While this action does not injure Bessie in any physical or even psychological way, it is nonetheless demonstrative of the chasm that exists between them, and that Madame Fenerolo

[255] "Toute fonctionnelle et spontanée qu'elle fût, cette exhibition aurait dû s'accompagner d'un peu de gêne et de trouble ou, à défaut, instaurer entre les occupantes de la voiture ce climat d'élémentaire complicité par quoi, le temps d'une activité commune, tous individus de même sexe se trouvent unis dans les mêmes mouvements et les mêmes attitudes génériques. Il n'en avait rien été. [. . .] Non, il y avait eu seulement un geste de gérante—exclusivement, totalement cela, et l'évidence fulgurante que pour Madame Fenerolo il n'existait de mode d'être que de gérante du SUMABA" (*Hop là* 23-24).

consciously or subconsciously perpetuates. To that effect, "even though the scene progressed uninterrupted [. . .], it was clear that a brutal event had taken place just the same: one whose troubling effects were already being felt" (*Hoppla* 14).[256] Gavarry thus depicts brutality not only as acts of physical or verbal violence, but also as the subtle ways in which power dynamics are maintained to the detriment of one of the parties.

With the frame for what constitutes trauma thus expanded, in the novel's third section Gavarry pinpoints a particular moment—in itself banal—as pivotal to the escalating tension. When Madame Fenerolo turns off the radio while driving Bessie home during a terrible traffic jam, the action is elevated from simple and meaningless to emblematic of the latent brutality that Madame Fenerolo represents. An action that occurs within a simple declarative sentence, "In the Opel, in particular, Madame Fenerolo, in a fit of rage, went so far as to hit the off button of her car radio . . . and this made all the difference"[257] is transformed into the all-capital "*THIS*" that recurs throughout the third section, becoming emblematic of the dangerous toxicity threatening to explode in violent anger (*Hoppla* 120). "*THIS* was in the air, epidemic, and *THIS* threatened to contaminate all persons and all matter, to infest every land, to gangrene burns and deepen wounds until all human bodies were stricken with its inhumanity" (*Hoppla* 120).[258] In the absence of a clear enemy, the pervasive trauma has instead been obliquely named, thus providing some reference against which the Judith-like rebellion can take place.

Seeds of Rebellion

[256] "De sorte que la scène avait beau continuer sans hiatus [. . .] il ne s'en était pas moins produit un événement brutal, dont se manifestaient dès maintenant les inquiétants effets" (*Hop là* 24).
[257] "Dans l'Opel, en particulier, Madame Fenerolo en vint à enfoncer avec hargne la touche marche/arrêt de son appareil, et cela changea tout" (*Hop là* 176).
[258] "*CELA* était dans l'air, épidémique, et *CELA* menaçait de contaminer tout le monde et la matière, d'investir tous les lieux, de pourrir les brûlures et de creuser les plaies jusqu'à frapper d'inhumanité les corps" (*Hop là* 177).

Just as brutality is framed in an unusual way, so too rebellion first appears not as a definite action, but rather as a vague and contagious malaise. "Between the epigastrium and the pelvic region, in among the meanderings of our entrails, there germinates Refusal. [. . .] Finally, when it outgrows the belly—as do pain or rage in similar circumstances—Refusal is externalized" (*Hoppla* 36).[259] The brutality is present in the mundane, and the presence or absence of rebellion must likewise appear within the framework of everyday decisions and actions. Thus when Bessie accepts Madame Fenerolo's subtle oppression presented in the seemingly benign question of whether Bessie agrees that a seafood counter in the grocery store is a good idea, it is understood as a grave shortcoming:

> It hardly matters that the willful spirit the utterance is putting under siege might only have wanted to greet it with resignation . . . or that this spirit might perhaps have wanted to resist. And even if we were to beseech it—"If only, if only Bessie wouldn't . . ." or "Please, at least let Bessie be granted permission to say nothing!"—it would take no notice, calmly committing its violence.
>
> Thus, when Bessie finally does acquiesce, it amounts to an atrocity. (*Hoppla* 69)[260]

This particular moment demonstrates a further complexity of social trauma that is not typically present in trauma that occurs through a concrete action or because of loss: that of complicity. Here Bessie is presented as complying with the power structure that favors Madame Fenerolo in a way that solidifies that system. Thus it becomes even more difficult for a third party such as Ti-

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[259] "Entre épigastre et région pelvienne, parmi les méandres de nos intestins, là germe le Refus. [. . .] Puis quand le moment vient qu'à sa croissance la place manque dans notre ventre, comme en pareil cas font aussi la doleur ou la rage, le Refus s'extériorise" (*Hop là* 54-55).

[260] "Si la volonté qu'il prétend investir ne l'accueillera que par abdication, si peut-être elle voudra résister, peu lui importe. Et même supplié—'Pourvu, pourvu que Bessie ne' ou 'De grâce, qu'au moins lui soit permis de se taire!'—, il passe outre, exerçant placidement sa violence. / Aussi quand Bessie acquiesce en effet c'est une atrocité" (*Hop là* 100).

Jus to rebel against the oppressive system, for his mother has become a part of it. Bessie does harm to herself by enabling Madame Fenerolo's power, and in doing so, she also becomes like Madame Fenerolo:

> Questions such as this one, of the "seafood counter" type, act upon the organism with violence. The unease we experience at first soon worsens, grows oppressive. Icy currents course through the abdominal cavity; the pharynx and larynx contract, the stomach turns; finally, with all functions disrupted, our bodily fluids flow to the coarse, shivering surface of our skin, our flesh itself on the verge of spilling out of our mouth. Hence, our failing consciousness barely distinguishes outside from inside [. . .] Or, again, as when, deep within us, we're unable to distinguish between desire and rage, resentment and remorse, while we're ravaged by emotion [. . .] The women hardly more women than mere reflections of women, or worse, neither is more noticeably Deux-Rivières than Fenerolo, nor is rebellion still distinct from submission. (*Hoppla* 85-86)[261]

It is worth noting that in both of the above scenes, the narrative voice shifts from a third-person omniscient view to a first-person plural, incorporating the reader and the narrator both within the emotions and consequences of Bessie's actions. Through the shift in voice, Gavarry thus engages the reader in the conflict afflicting the society in general and Bessie in particular; he positions the reader to take sides against the social injustice.

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[261] "Pareille question, de type 'rayon poissonnerie', agit avec violence sur l'organisme. La gêne que d'abord nous en ressentons bientôt s'aggrave et nous oppresse. De longues coulées glacées ondoient dans l'abdomen, pharynx et larynx se contractent, l'estomac se révulse; enfin toutes les fonctions se trouvant déréglées, nos intimes fluides exsudent à la surface frissonnante et grenue de la peau, et la chair même nous vient au bord des lèvres. Dès lors, notre conscience moribonde hésite à reconnaître le dehors, le dedans. [. . .] Et comme aussi, tel sentiment qui ravage notre for intérieur, il arrive que nous ne démêlions plus si c'est désir ou rage, rancœur ou regret [. . .] À peine femmes les femmes davantage que reflets de femmes, ou pire, aucune bien clairement Deux-Rivières plutôt que Fenerolo, ni rébellion rien nettement plutôt que soumission" (*Hop là* 122).

At another, similar moment, Gavarry describes the blurring of boundaries but also of self-awareness that makes it impossible to tell whether one is successfully rebelling or becoming more deeply complicit by remaining silent: "Deep within us, the throbbing sensation reappears—one that both urges us on and impairs our capacity to judge whether, faced with *THIS*, our silence is an act of dignity or of craven submission [. . .] Then, prone by turns to greater or lesser anxiety, in the end we remain uncertain as to what silence or speech even mean" (*Hoppla* 146).[262] Still, the acquiescence and even the blurring of roles have the secondary effect of creating a stronger desire to refuse such a system.

> And summoned in this way to be subsumed within this principle, seeking by nature to negate their individual existences on pain of being deemed utterly meaningless, all of the aforementioned entities, confined in the hermetically sealed cabin of the metallic gray Opel, vibrated silently with the same spirit of refusal, and under the thunderous hammering of hail maintained the highly charged, stifling atmosphere, suffused with violence—as sometimes happens when, in the face of the unacceptable, one's sense of humiliation wells up from deep inside oneself, quivering for a long tense moment before erupting in a cry of rage, or even an act of brute force. (*Hoppla* 15)[263]

Gavarry makes it clear that when trauma and fault are unclear, the possibility of pushing back against brutality is equally nebulous. By depicting Bessie as complicit with the oppression that

[262] "Car intimement ne tarde à renaître un sentiment lancinant, qui nous presse et dans le même temps nous empêche de trancher si face à *CELA* notre silence est acte ou bien de dignité, ou bien de soumission péteuse" (*Hop là* 215).
[263] "Et ainsi sommées de s'inclure dans cela qui leur déniait une existence propre, sous peine de compter pour rien, toutes ces entités confinées dans l'habitacle hermétique de l'Opel gris métallisé vibraient sourdement du même esprit de refus, entretenant sous le martèlement tonitruant de la grêle une atmosphère électrique, suffocante, chargée de violence, comme devant l'inadmissible il arrive aussi que le sentiment d'humiliation s'exaspère dans notre for intérieur, frissonnant longtemps avant de précipiter tout à coup en cri de colère, voire en acte musclé" (*Hop là* 25).

pushes Ti-Jus to rebellion, it is clear that assigning blame is not as clear-cut as Ti-Jus's action might suggest.

Suburban Banality

The story's setting is an essential component of the action that unfolds. Suburbs in France, in this case those surrounding Paris, differ greatly from their American counterparts in terms of demographics and also in terms of public perception. In the past decade, the suburbs around Paris have been the site of numerous riots and skirmishes, frequently between police and marginalized young people. The suburbs provide a glimpse into the complexities of the French political and social climate, as they often bring to the surface numerous social inequalities, and also highlight the xenophobia that continues to pervade parts of the French population. In his article about *Hop là,* "Strange Things on the Edge of this City," Harri Veivo remarks on the centrality of city life in the French psyche that is not found in the same way in the United States: "From Baudelaire through Verhaeren and Apollinaire to the surrealists, the modern experience takes place in the center of the city, in boulevards, cafés, passages, and department stores, whereas the suburbia is often disregarded" (Veivo 285). The view of suburbs is predominantly negative, so for Gavarry to establish the suburbs as a legitimate site for the setting of a literary work is an unusual move.

In order for his focus on the suburbs to be credible, Gavarry must (and does) engage with certain topics, the most central of which is the mundane. As Veivo notes, "In suburbia, the banal is hidden behind a thick layer of images constituted by negative cultural categorizations traditionally favoring the center over the periphery, by the failure of the post-war housing utopia, and by media and political discourses marked by scandalizing, patronizing, repressive, or in

other ways alarmist attitudes" (Veivo 286). In *Hop là*, Gavarry works against the notion of city as center—in fact, Paris proper does not figure into the story at all, aside perhaps from the RER trains that are speeding away from it.

In the same spirit of overturning the norm, Veivo points out that Gavarry's story also upsets the conclusions of the story of Judith on which it is based. Rather than a clear and laudable victory, the consequences of Ti-Jus's act are obscure. Neither praise nor blame is assigned, and instead of resulting in a sense of progress, Ti-Jus's action seems instead to spark the cyclical repetition of the book's three versions. Because of the lack of definite outcome, Veivo sees the rebellion as a failure:

> These elements provide the basic storyline for the suburban story, which becomes thus a story of seduction as means of overturning relations of power, but without the victorious end, which in the original biblical narrative justifies Judith's violence. In *Hop là !,* we thus have killing as response to oppression, but set in an imperfect story that leaves the question of sanction pending. In this sense, the very first elements in Gavarry's project give a certain moral stance to the text: *Hop là !* is not the story of a transgressive act that becomes justified by what it offers to the community, like The Book of Judith; it is the story of a revolt that is motivated but aborted, since not giving rise to an improvement. (Veivo 295)

Veivo's argument is compelling. Gavarry ends the story each time before any consequences become apparent, which leaves open the possibility of failure. While Madame Fenerolo serves as an embodiment of "THIS" and therefore of systemic oppression, she is ultimately no more than a store manager. Ti-Jus's violence against her was, in the end, against a simple individual rather than an entire system, and lacked the power of Judith's original rebellion. Just as the

circumstances of *Hop là* are banal, so the climactic action may also be trivial, ineffectual, and therefore tragic. The full consequences are unknown in Gavarry's account, but it is unlikely that Ti-Jus's actions unleashed any sweeping reforms or other large-scale changes.

Whether or not Ti-Jus's rebellion against Madame Fenerolo and the system she represents was effective, Gavarry's depiction of the complexity of the situation certainly is. By fragmenting the formal aspects of the novel, and by displacing the systemic oppression into a seemingly benign action ("THIS"), Gavarry conveys the problematic nature of rebelling against an indefinable force. Indeed, part of the reason that Ti-Jus is unable effectively to oppose the system resides in the difficulty in precisely defining the oppressor. As with other traumatic events, a tension persists between the necessity to speak and the inability to do so. Gavarry maintains that tension by depicting the essence of oppression not as Madame Fenerolo, but as the unassailable "THIS".

Ghostly Signs of Trauma: *Beloved*

While the displacement of trauma into a human figure is vague and fragmented in *Hop là*, in *Beloved* the embodiment is powerful and direct. Beloved as a character exists as a representation of Sethe's pain, both the pain that she suffered as a victim of Schoolteacher and others at Sweet Home, as well as the pain and regret of having killed her child in order to spare her the same suffering. At the same time, Beloved is a representation of Sethe's need to work through the events of her past, and the complications of memory and emotion that arise from attempting to revisit such trauma. Because the story of Sethe and Beloved is one particular story that illustrates a period of profound social injustice, the way that Morrison engages with it suggests a certain way of reading that time in history as well as the particular story. Such

implications create a layer of added complexity that is beyond an individual trauma, because the social and historical repercussions continue to play out through many generations in many different ways. In "Beloved and Shoah: Witnessing the Unspeakable," Laurie Vickroy draws parallels between Toni Morrison's work and that of Claude Lanzmann on the Holocaust, and recognizes that each of the two must consider the tension between silence and expression on a broad scale, for historical understanding and interpretation are at stake even if the story being told is of a single individual. As Vickroy suggests, "Toni Morrison and Claude Lanzmann recognize that the silencing forces of trauma and oppression have shaped and distorted how humanity remembers and responds to such events, changing our conceptions of history and our relation to the dead" (Vickroy 123). Through memory, storytelling, and physical embodiment, Morrison demonstrates the difficulty of overcoming the "silencing forces" and distilling trauma into a single narrative account.

The Deviousness of Memory

One of the central narrative challenges for Morrison is how to loosen Sethe's traumatic memories in a way that is both powerful and emotionally believable. In some cases Sethe deliberately represses or silences memories; in other cases, she would like to forget but cannot; and in still other moments, she would like to remember but cannot. Memory is complex in *Beloved*, and Morrison is careful to allow memory to function in all of these different ways. As one example, when early in the novel Sethe tries to remember the trauma she has suffered, all that comes to mind is the beauty of the place where it occurred:

> As for the rest, she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious [. . .] and suddenly there was Sweet Home

> rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (Morrison 6)

In this instance, any memory of Sweet Home is unwelcome for Sethe, but a memory of beauty appalls her far more than a memory of trauma would. Memory therefore seems as uncontrollable as it is powerful.

Another difficulty Sethe experiences related to memory pertains to ownership. While nobody would willingly take on traumatic memories, those who experience indirect memories are in a somewhat more complicated position than those who remember from direct experience. In this case the memory and pain relates to absence; there is a sense of entitlement that one may only experience pain or loss if that loss was direct. Denver experiences this exclusion from memory most vividly. While she is intimately affected by her mother's past even if she does not know all of its details, she is not permitted to share in the memories that recall it, though those memories involve her own father:

> Denver sat down on the bottom step. There was nowhere else gracefully to go. They were a twosome, saying "Your daddy" and "Sweet Home"in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers. Once the absence had belonged to Grandma Baby—a son, deeply

> mourned because he was the one who had bought her out of there. Then it was the mother's absent husband. Now it was this hazelnut stranger's absent friend. Only those who knew him ("knew him well") could claim his absence for themselves. (Morrison 13)

Memories are abhorred and cherished, repressed and invited, making those who experience them feel isolated or included. In order to capture and portray all these facets of memory and its relationship to the characters' identities, Morrison moves away from linear storytelling in favor of a more elliptic and meandering narrative path. Doing so allows her to portray the characters as they experience their own memories, showing how those memories affect them.

In her analysis, Vickroy highlights the tension that survivors or sufferers experience of the simultaneous desire to remember and forget, much like the incompatible desires to tell and to remain silent that I have examined in earlier chapters. In Vickroy's argument, silence is not the desired method of the victim, but rather the consequence of the tensions involving memory and repression:

> In their respective narratives, traumatic knowledge takes shape through dialogism, the problematic of memory, repetition (e.g., involuntary returns of memory or feelings), image-making, incongruities and silence. Morrison and Lanzmann avoid standard chronology and linear storytelling, seeking out the paths of elicited survivor memories that are characterized by the struggle to both remember and forget. Silence is an especially important element of traumatic events in its relation to repression, secrecy and loss, and it is a key to exploring traumatic knowledge in that it can signify hidden or forbidden knowledge as well as the mechanisms of concealment. (Vickroy 124)

As Vickroy notes, because of the conflicting desires to remember and to forget, silence becomes an important element of the victim's movement toward processing the past events. In *Beloved*, Morrison incorporates the element of silence by allowing memories to become present through the first ghostly, then tangible body of Beloved.

Trauma in the Flesh

The physical body is an important site for unspeakable memories. When Sethe cannot or will not speak of what she has experienced, Morrison creates physical ways of illustrating Sethe's repressed memories. The clearest example of the embodiment of trauma is Beloved herself, for she represents all of the unspoken memories that Sethe had never fully processed. By embodying trauma in a character, Morrison demonstrates the complexity of coming to terms with the pain of the past, for Beloved has whims and eccentricities that echo the tricks and treachery of memory. Sethe's body, too, physically shows some of the things that she does not speak of: an intricate tree-shaped scar on her back is a physical memory of an event too traumatic to be recalled in language. When she shares that physical scar with Paul D, the intimacy is as deep as it could be. The existence of the scar on her body—interestingly, in a place that she herself cannot see, and that others can only witness in moments of intimacy—allows Sethe to bear witness to her past without *speaking* of it. Whether Sethe tries to remember or forget, and whether or not she is willing to speak of her history, the scar is constantly there. The scar enables Sethe to remain silent about the trauma she has experienced without denying it.

Similarly, the existence of Beloved as an incarnation of Sethe's past allows Sethe's story to be told even if Sethe is a passive storyteller. Because Beloved is an independent character, and as such demonstrates a wide range of emotions and reactions, Morrison is able to suggest the

complex and uncontrollable nature of trauma and an individual's response to it. As Vickroy notes, "Morrison is able to dramatize the complexities of traumatic memory through her creation of Beloved. Beloved's return symbolizes Sethe's strong link with the past. [. . .] As Beloved evolves from ghost to flesh, Sethe gradually acknowledges her identity" (Vickroy 129). Vickroy suggests that the acceptance is gradual; however, neither Sethe nor ever denies Beloved's existence or her presence. Their responses to her do nonetheless change over time. While Sethe's memories of her past are complicated and she at times represses them, her complete acceptance of the return of her dead child as a physically present grown woman suggests a similar acceptance of her past.

Another important component of the physical embodiment of trauma in the character of Beloved is the connection that it suggests between love and trauma. More than simply associating a magnitude of grief with the death of a loved one that increases according to the bond between two people, in this instance Beloved's death was actually caused by the intensity of Sethe's love towards her. In scenes reminiscent of magical realism, Sethe and Denver coexist in relative peace with the dead baby's ghost, although at times the ghost's actions are more destructive. From early on, Sethe associates the power and potential destructiveness of the ghost directly to the degree to which she loved her baby: "'For a baby she throws a powerful spell,' said Denver. 'No more powerful than the way I loved her,' Sethe answered" (4). Trauma is thus depicted as both equal and reciprocal to love.

Storytelling and Silence

As Sethe works through her past and as Beloved arrives as an incarnation of it, a tension persists between silence and speech, particularly storytelling. When Beloved arrives, she has

insatiable desires for sugar and for stories; she prompts Sethe to revisit her memories and to speak about them. Unlike questions from strangers which were often too broad or showed misunderstanding or judgment, Beloved's prompts were often so specific as to spark particular memories for Sethe. "Tell me your diamonds," Beloved prompts, tapping into a past detail that Sethe herself had forgotten (Morrison 58). Sethe does go on to tell her, using the stories as nourishment for Beloved, and creating the unexpected result of satisfying an unknown need in herself: "It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. [. . .] But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it" (Morrison 58). By reminding Sethe of specific moments or sensations, Beloved is able to prompt Sethe to speak in a way that no others can. Vickroy emphasizes the way that Lanzmann focuses on sense memories when interviewing people as a way to pierce their silence (Vickroy 125). Recalling specific sensations or details is, in both works, an effective way of encouraging someone to speak about a small detail of a trauma that is too large or too deep to process in its entirety.

By asking the types of questions that she does, as well as by her physical presence, Beloved becomes the interlocutor that allows Sethe an avenue to narrate her memories. Paul D, as one who shared in Sethe's past and can thus engage with her about it in different ways than those who have not experienced the same things, also plays an important role in enabling Sethe to voice her past. Paul D's arrival at their home, 124, serves as a catalyst to rekindle Sethe's memories, as well as her awareness of the present. "So, kneeling in the keeping room the morning after Paul D came, she was distracted by the two orange squares that signaled how

barren 124 really was. He was responsible for that. Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows suddenly had view" (Morrison 39). By sparking a renewed awareness of her surroundings, Paul D opens the possibility for examining both the present and the past, for only when he arrives is Sethe able to see clearly. As Vickroy notes,

> Sethe acknowledges that the past still haunts her and complains about how much horror her memory can hold, often withdrawing from her memories for fear of what might surface (70). She cannot remember her own history as clearly until Paul D fills in missing pieces of their past and she is questioned by the girl who calls herself Beloved. They provoke Sethe's feared and suppressed memories, but with these witnesses, Sethe can, briefly, relive her past and express her outrage within a safe context. (Vickroy 132)

The tension between silence and expression is thus vividly present in *Beloved* much as it is in each of the works that I have examined in previous chapters. By creating a character that both embodies the traumatic past and also prompts the traumatized character to express so many repressed memories, Morrison suggests the complexity of memory and the emotionally volatile experience of willingly revisiting remembered events.

What is apparent through Sethe's connections with both Beloved and Paul D is that her ability or inability to speak of her past depends a great deal on the experiences and inherent understanding of the person with whom she is speaking. To be required to give background information or explanations of why something occurred results in a shutting down, as though the questions of context or consequences brought on unbearable pain. In speaking with Paul D about Beloved's death, Sethe knows that she cannot tell the full story from start to finish, and that she

will depend on Paul D to fill in the gaps. "Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off—she could never explain" (Morrison 163). This is surely due in part to the difficulty that is always present in witness testimony, but perhaps also partly due to the nature of the social system that allowed such trauma to occur in the first place. If Sethe's story reaches the ears of an unsympathetic listener, the risk is not only apathy or judgment, but also that the person will affirm or contribute to the oppressive system that Sethe so desperately wanted her children to avoid.

Without prompting from Beloved or Paul D, Sethe also avoids self-contemplation; she manages to get by through the mentality that "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (Morrison 40). While she may not deny what happened in her past, she does not readily admit to it, either. As Paul D begins to unsettle the rhythms of the household, Sethe shows resistance to the changes:

> "Maybe I should leave things the way they are," she said.
>
> "How are they?"
>
> "We get along."
>
> "What about inside?"
>
> "I don't go inside." (Morrison 45-46)

Sethe and Denver get by in relative calm in the years when Beloved's ghost haunts 124; in a way, the ghost in the house allows Sethe to avoid thinking about her past as such without denying what happened. She can refer to the ghost and the damage it does without opening into her emotional response to her past. The desire simply to carry on through the horror of the past and the fears of the future is a survival mechanism for Sethe, for she has seen many others come

through similar nightmares only to lose their grip on reality. While the focus of the narrative is Sethe's own story, at times Morrison reminds the reader of the breadth of the trauma. A litany of psychologically crippled neighbors is the backdrop against which Sethe desires merely to carry on: "Just manage it. Not break, fall or cry each time a hateful picture drifted in front of her face. Not develop some permanent craziness like Baby Suggs' friend, a young woman in a bonnet whose food was full of tears. Like Aunt Phyllis, who slept with her eyes wide open. Like Jackson Till, who slept under the bed. All she wanted was to go on. And she had" (Morrison 97). By displacing her traumatic past on the ghostly (and later corporeal) embodiment of Beloved, Sethe manages to avoid denying her past without allowing it to dominate her. Beloved represents a complex web of trauma: the societal trauma of slavery, the particular brutality of Schoolteacher and the others who abused Sethe at Sweet Home, the individual crime of Sethe's murder of her baby girl, as well as the mourning that was the result of that crime—Beloved embodies all these events and elements of the past that Sethe would never be able to fully explain while still maintaining her sanity and her ability to provide for Denver.

Conclusion

Both *Beloved* and *Hop là ! un deux trois* engage with a collective, social trauma and a resulting murder that attempts to disrupt the cycle of oppression; in *Beloved*, Sethe kills her baby girl to protect her from the suffering she knows will come, while in *Hop là*, Ti-Jus kills Madame Fenerolo as a symbol of an oppressive class system. Because the causes and consequences of trauma deeply rooted in social systems are arguably even more complex than other traumatic events, both Morrison and Gavarry displace the complexity into figures or devices that are outside of the immediate chain of causality. In *Hop là*, the brutality and injustice found in the

Parisian suburbs is referred to as "*THIS,*" a gesture which initially referred to Madame Fenerolo switching off a radio, but expanded to encompass a broad and indefinable range of oppressive words and actions. In both cases, by displacing the complexities of trauma into another figure, the writers are able to portray characters that do not deny the trauma, but do not directly speak of it, either. They are able to preserve the natural tension between silence and expression that nearly always accompanies trauma, which compels the victim to talk about a traumatic experience but also inhibits the victim's ability to express what has happened. This technique of displacement is effective for the characters within the novels, for they are able to process traumatic experiences that might otherwise be too nebulous to navigate; it is also effective for the readers, who have a clear image of how difficult it is for the characters to process the complexities of social trauma.

VII. Conclusion

The acts of mourning, writing, and reading display a number of commonalities, which I hope I have demonstrated throughout each of the preceding chapters. Each of these gestures is a temporal act, first of all, not grasped in an instant but unfolding slowly over time. Within the time-bound processes, each of them also includes fundamentally paradoxical elements that can often be reduced to the tension between expression and silence. The act of the mourner becomes that of the writer when he or she chooses to use the written word to express a traumatic experience; the act of the reader also overlaps with writing when the reader interprets the written work at hand. In some ways, then, writing is a unifying element among all three.

When victims of trauma use the spoken word to describe what they have gone through, the reluctance to speak or the impossibility to reduce the experience into words is manifested through silence. When those same testimonies are given as text, however, silence is more difficult to portray. Leaving blank space on a page is one way to indicate a reticence, but writers have also explored other meaningful, more subtle methods of indicating an impossibility of expression. By experimenting with formal elements of a text, a writer can suggest silence and the unspeakable on the page. The manifestation of the unspeakable in these cases, more than a simple description of a lack of sound, is more like the deep, fundamental interruption that Blanchot describes as being inherent in language itself.

Because aesthetic theories on writing after and about the Holocaust are both prevalent and diverse, theorists that engage with literature about the Holocaust provide a useful background for understanding literature of trauma. While the sheer scale of the Holocaust sets it apart from other traumatic events, starting with such an extreme example evokes a range of

reactions that also occur in traumatic events on a more personal scale. I found that including theorists whose work emphasized the literary response to the Holocaust, as well as theorists that focused on victims and trauma in a more general way and included a strong psychological component, made for an important counterpoint to the theoretical examination of text and language of writers such as Blanchot and Derrida. The texts of Dominick LaCapra, Berel Lang, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub helped to provide the balance I was seeking among critical voices. Incorporating works and ideas from those various schools of thought enabled me to examine the literature that I selected with a fuller understanding of both the use of language and the experience of trauma.

The enigmatic quality of Edmond Jabès's writing was a compelling first glimpse of how writers can suggest the unspeakable in beautifully subtle ways. In *Le livre des questions*, Jabès intertwines questioning, writing, and the wound in a way that suggests the deep affinities among them, while still leaving room for contradictions and incompatibilities. Jabès's notion of the Book as an ideal object that unites all of those different components is thought-provoking, because it is also the site of so many contradictions. For Jabès, though, unity *is* contradictory, so any inclusive image must not try to solve the underlying paradoxes.

Roubaud's deeply personal and intimate poetry continues to work with opposing pairs, especially light and dark, in unusual ways, but shifts the scope of the tragedy to something smaller. Roubaud uses concrete images rather than conceptual metaphors to illustrate his grief: drinking tepid instant coffee in habitual but useless silence so as not to wake his beloved, for example. Roubaud also makes explicit the tension between the need for silence and the need for expression, noting that he was unable to write for thirty months after his wife's death, but followed that arid time with a period of writing that resulted in *Quelque chose noir*. He contrasts

this need to remain silent with an earlier loss, which sparked in him the need to write poetry in the first place. He experienced the dual compulsions of trauma, to speak and to remain silent, firsthand, and did not deny either of them.

Julio Cortázar and Macedonio Fernández both take lighter approaches, using playfulness and humor as an indirect means of processing loss. While one might expect that playfulness would indicate a denial or repression of pain, in these two cases it is an avenue for expressing the pain of loss while still allowing that loss a certain privacy. Their works are not as intimate as that of Roubaud, but they suggest intimacy through things left unspoken. Both Cortázar and Macedonio also incorporate the important element of time, which is integral in mourning as well as in writing. Cortázar in particular works with the motif of a journey, both the literal trip that he and his wife took in their Volkswagen bus, as well as the implied journey of love, intimacy, loss, and mourning. Because game playing calls central systems and their limits into question, a ludic approach allows the writers to examine the processes of both mourning and writing from a perspective that is neither completely a part of those processes, nor entirely outside of them. Cortázar and Macedonio both use the tension between the freedom that playfulness allows and the limits that are necessary to any game as a way of confining trauma to a manageable sphere, allowing them to explore deeply what would otherwise be unspeakable.

Finally, Gérard Gavarry and Toni Morrison's works both demonstrated possible responses to trauma when the perpetrator and the victim are far less clearly defined. While the consequences of social trauma may be apparent (and may be traumatic events in and of themselves, as is the case in each of these books), the root causes are far more subtle. Victims not only must deal with the inherent tension between silence and expression, but also struggle with what can be expressed in relation to an indefinable aggressor. Given that complexity,

Gavarry and Morrison both choose to displace the notion of the trauma at hand into third parties, whether a word and a gesture as in Gavarry's case, or a character, as in Morrison's. These outside representations of trauma allow the characters who are victims of social trauma to perceive their trauma in a different way, and arguably makes it more likely that they will be able to speak about it and come to terms with it (although in the case of Ti-Jus especially, there is no redemptive quality to the story's finale). Characters are able to speak of trauma in a way that is emotionally true while at the same time preserving the unspeakable nature of the trauma. They neither deny nor directly address the situation in its full complexity.

I hope it is clear that while these works vary widely in tone, subject matter, national origin, and style, they share an essential trait in their approach to portraying the emotional processing of trauma. In each case, the author explores ways of integrating silence and the difficulty of expression into not only the content of the work, but into its very form. The silence takes various guises: unanswerable questions, paradox, use of imagery, white space, ludics, and displacement are just some of the tactics that the authors employ to express the unspeakable. By recasting the idea of unspeakability into the form of the work using unusual methods, the writers succeed in avoiding clichéd attempts to express profundity or pain.

Each of the books that I have discussed strikes a powerful emotional chord, which I believe is directly related to the ways the authors engage with the tension between silence and expression in emotionally painful circumstances. The compelling effect that all of these works have on readers is likely due at least in part to the ways that the authors recognize, preserve, and reflect on the psychological aftermath of trauma. Blanchot recognizes the discontinuity inherent in language and discourse, and when authors or artists emphasize this discontinuity, the result may be a nuanced (though different) understanding of reality and perception. In just that way, by

their awareness of the paradoxes and contradictions an individual experiences when trying to process an overwhelming event, authors that call attention to these tensions rather than denying them foster a powerful bond with readers, who have likely experienced a similar set of emotions, even if the circumstances were different. The element of unspeakability exerts a powerful force, and writers who find ways of incorporating it into the language of the text are able to create works of literature that access the intensely personal spheres of trauma, mourning, and pain without oversimplifying the complexity of the process of coming to terms with suffering.

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